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Central European University, Open University

Community in Postmodern Philosophy with an
emphasis on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy

M.Phil. thesis

Gender Studies

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How else can one write but of those things which one does not know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say.

Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. xxi

We write before knowing what to say and how to say it, and in order to find out, if possible.

Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained for*

Children, p. 119

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Introduction

In the postmodern condition, when values, norms, meanings grow uncertain and lose their ground, when morality, politics, family, and many other social institutions inherited from the so-called modernity cease to serve us one by one, community itself becomes problematic. On what basis can it be erected? God, humanity, nature—everything has become suspect. Perhaps only one possibility remains at our disposal: to take the very lack of consistency as a basis for community. Postmodern philosophy attempts this. It seeks a third path between myth and nihilism, that is, between traditional unitary community and the absence of community. This way is claimed to be found in the community undoing itself, or, better, in the very undoing of community. The absence of myth (as well as a community based on it) is thought, contrary to nihilism, not as lack and nothing. The very rejection of myth is a work—if I can use this word here—of community. The impossibility of immanence and closed up identity is supposed to be a basis for an understanding of community that obviates the abysses of both totalitarianism and nihilism. To put it simply, the impossibility of the One, of the Absolute leads immediately to multiplicity and thus to irreducible community.

Therefore, instead of the alternative between eternal sense and non-sense, this philosophy relies on the undoing of sense and seeks therein all sense of community. Ontology comes to be crucial here, since Being—at least from Heidegger on—is conceived as having a similar structure of undoing: Being presents beings¹ (exists them in the transitive sense of the verb) but does so in such a way that lays no firm ground for their continuous existence. Thus the very Being of community justifies its undoing. The sense of

¹ Terms “Being” and “being” here correspond to German *Sein* and *Seiende*. For a more detailed discussion see the note on p. 10.

community is sought, therefore, in the ontology or in the very fact that “there is something,” that Being “is,” or existence “exists.” The structures of *there is* and the undoing of community are strictly parallel.

The conviction behind this is that the undoing—which is the undoing of the founding myth of community—might provide a sufficient ground for a community to come. A deeper still conviction is that ontology or understanding of “how things truly are” is sufficient for the justification of community. But what does “sufficient” mean? Obviously, it has ethical connotations². Undoing or interruption are associated with anti-totalitarianism, multiplicity of voices or cultures, recognition of the other, genuinely ethical attitude toward the other, and so on. The whole project is a response to challenges of the XX century. However, is undoing sufficient? Is such recognition of the other’s freedom sufficient for community? This is the question of the present work. I shall argue that there is never merely undoing but always undoing endowed with a meaning. To put it another way, the interruption of sense does make sense by itself but this sense may be different. There is never one sense of *there is* (and any philosophy trying to find out this one sense tends to conceive of it as a pure negativity, death), but different senses. I shall argue as well that the latter have the structure of “for the sake of...” which means that not the undoing itself is important for community but that for the sake of which it is performed.

This opens, I believe, a sphere of meanings different from that of signification³. Although this sphere is to large extent obscure to me, I can discern two meanings possibly

² Such terms as “sufficient” or “proper” are used here with all their vagueness. They cannot be defined in this work because of their belonging to its ethical project. They point obviously to what I, the author, consider being sufficient and proper (or rather what I consider insufficient and improper). No objective meaning is possible in this case. In this respect the following discussion is prescriptive rather than descriptive.

³ Perhaps Emmanuel Levinas was the first who discovered this sphere and distinguished it from a

situated in it. The first has to do with the multiplicity of meanings supposedly caused by the impossibility of immanence. I wrote “supposedly” because strictly speaking multiplicity is not an effect of undoing, it is rather its reason: undoing is performed for the sake of multiplicity of meanings. In a sense, this is a life for the future, novelty, always-new experience. This is the openness toward the coming. It is this openness that is frequently interpreted as the openness toward the other able to provide a basis for proper ethical relationships (see, for example, Bauman 1993). This picture is in no way totalitarian nor purely nihilistic (in the Nietzschean sense of overcoming nihilism by saying “Yes” to the world). And subjectivity of this sort—if we can still speak of subjectivity—is not the autonomous self-sufficient subjectivity of the classical philosophy. However, is this subject really concerned with others? Are this acceptance and this “Yes” not rather at bottom just “taking circumstances into account?” Is it not the utilising of others (without however imposing anything on them) with the aim to sustain oneself in the ceaseless movement of becoming? This makes others free, for sure. Moreover, this implies a will to accept them as free (ironically, first of all free of me). But this freeing is rather abandonment and break-up. Perhaps proper social relationships need another structure.

The other meaning in the sphere of *for the sake of* is the offering of community: on the one hand, doing-undoing seems to be the only proper tie with a free being; on the other hand, it has to be performed not for the sake of itself but for others. Doing is necessary because it is the establishing of ties, but undoing is also necessary because these are ties with a free being, free to the point where the other can decline the offer of community. In still another register, undoing presupposes doing—including the opening of doing and undoing themselves. The latter in the following text is interpreted as laying down foundation, or inaugurating language, or a will to have some language and foundation

(which all are undone in the very event of their laying down). The two meanings I have just spoken of are the meanings of the play of doing and undoing. (Is it thus a play at all?) Is it as such purposeless? In this work the two meanings of the doing-undoing are considered. It might be for the sake of 1) maintaining a flowing identity, “Being-there,” or even “Being human”, or 2) establishing ties with others by offering them a common Being (and thus sacrificing one’s own “Being-there” or even “Being human” for the common Being).

How can we reveal these two meanings? In the philosophy I am concerned with the second one appears under the name of writing or literature. It has, however, a contradictory structure comprising both above-mentioned meanings. To clarify this structure I take as an example two of Jean-Luc Nancy’s works devoted entirely to the concepts of community and sense (which is always common, according to Nancy), namely *The Inoperative Community* (Nancy 1991) and *The Sense of the World* (Nancy 1997)⁴. In these books writing is two-dimensional. One dimension is the production of meaning and as such is not actually discernible from reading in its hermeneutical understanding. It is responsible for the multiplicity of meanings and plurality of voices in any particular text. The other

⁴ This work was originally planned as a critique of community and ethics in Nancy’s writing. However, this critique demanded a significant preparatory work. Consequently, what was supposed to be an introduction, orientation, and provision of preliminary definitions turned into the work in itself, and Nancy could no longer hold the main place within it. Although his concept still remains a privileged example, I do not insist that it exhausts the theme or may be counted as *the* concept of postmodern community. It is worth noting, nevertheless, that in a recent *Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism* (2001) Nancy is mentioned among three authors (the other being Giorgio Agamben and Maurice Blanchot) who contributed most significantly into the postmodern understanding of community. Without denying the necessity of a more attentive analysis, I claim that the conflict discussed throughout the present work is one of the most important in the postmodern understanding of community, ethics, and—I would say—humanity. It haunts this understanding at least as a problem to be solved.

dimension is what Nancy calls sharing, that is, offering and establishing communal ties performed by any act of writing. In general terms, they correspond to two functions of language: 1) cognitive or creative, consisting in the constituting of the symbolic world to live in, and 2) phatic, consisting in addressing others and opening for their addressing. However, Nancy tends to identify the two and conceive of the world's multiplicity as already offering and establishing ties. But in fact they are not merely incommensurable. They imply different ethical attitudes. At least this is what I hope to demonstrate.

Therefore, the following text is divided on three chapters. Chapter 1 provides a preliminary view on Being, time, language, and their relationships as they are used throughout the work. Chapter 2 applies this vision to Derrida's understanding of *différance* and subjectivity and makes conclusions concerning possible theory of community that it entails. Chapter 3, final and largest, is devoted to a detailed analysis of Nancy's theory of community as it is presented in his two mentioned books.

Chapter 1

Preliminary Exposition: Being, Time, Language

This introductory chapter is devoted to the background of the postmodern understanding of community. It describes the context wherein this understanding comes up and develops. The discussion of some topics in this chapter might sometimes look redundant or even irrelevant. However, it is in fact the introducing of concepts and structures that I shall apply later. Only at that time will the purpose of their discussion be fully recognised. In addition, the reader has to keep in mind that these concepts and structures themselves are rather preliminary. These are, so to say, starting conditions destined to be transformed, sometimes considerably. Here, in this general exposition, I shall start with ontology, the role of temporality in it and proceed to their interpretation from the viewpoint of language. This latter interpretation will be a leading one throughout the rest of the work.

1.1 Being

I shall call the ontology I am about to describe the ontology of event. Along with Nancy, Levinas and others, I rely on Heidegger's distinction between *Sein* and *Seiende*⁵, so

⁵ Translating these terms into English is not easy because separately both of them are usually rendered as "being". Translators have offered different solutions such as writing the former with a capital "B" or replacing them with the pair existing-existent but all of these seem barely appropriate. Throughout the following text I translate them as Being (always capitalised) and entity(ies) (or being(s) in phrases such as "human beings"). This is the variant that John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson settled on in their

called ontological difference. I would present Heidegger's argument as follows. In *Being and Time* Heidegger seeks the meaning of Being. He asks, "What does it mean to be?" and goes on to the analysis of a specific entity which has in a way direct access to Being because "in its Being the Being itself is an issue." The last formula is the definition of entity that Heidegger calls Dasein. Being is always intentional, or directional, or "Being-towards." It is toward entity and this difference between Being and entity is irreducible. It would be wrong to speak of Being in terms of entities. The question "What is the Being of Being itself?" cannot be answered in this manner. Being does not have another "Being-toward-Being," with this process recursively going to infinity. Thus, there must be an entity whose Being is not intentional and which, consequently, bears its meaning in itself. This "entity" is Dasein grasped as event, act, process, all these terms being not fully appropriate. Late Heidegger speaks of event (*Ereignis*) viewed as the coming of an entity to Being, i.e. as a sort of act that makes what it is—the entity— of an entity. Thus the event of Being is the entity's becoming what it is. However, this sentence sounds ambiguous. Does the entity mentioned become entity as such ("entitiness"), entity of such and such a type, or a concrete singular entity? But in fact Heidegger's concern goes deeper. He asks about the happening of all these distinctions among which the principal one is between Being and entities. In this sense, as Giorgio Agamben remarks in *Language and Death* (Agamben 1991), the term Dasein should be better translated not as Being-there, but as Being-the-there, i.e. Being the very place where Being itself happens (Heidegger himself points out in *Zollikoner Seminars* (Heidegger 1992, 87) that the French equivalent for Dasein should be *être-le-là* instead of the routinely accepted *être-là*).

translation of *Being and Time* (see their notes 1 on pages 19 and 22 in Heidegger (1962)). In cases of obscurity I use the most direct solution—German spelling. The only exceptions are quotations, which I left unchanged.

Heidegger proceeds to the description of event in terms of ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*⁶)—Dasein's ability to realise, to perform, to participate in the event of Being. By doing so, Dasein gains, so to say, immediate access to Being, which Heidegger calls understanding (*Verstehen*). In the final analysis, every entity's meaning refers, through a series of relations, to Dasein's abilities-to-be. Dasein therefore is the very Being of meanings discovered in the world. According to Heidegger in the act of understanding (which is to say, in Dasein's Being, since this Being is essentially understanding) the totality of signification, which he calls significance or meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*), is disclosed to Dasein. By its own Being Dasein makes meanings as references to its abilities-to-be possible. Understanding is Dasein's familiarity with relations that allow these references:

Dasein, in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being, and which can thus make themselves known as they are in themselves [in seinem Ansich] (Heidegger 1962, 120).

However, meanings in understanding are not explicit. In order for that to happen, the interpretation (*Auslegung*) is necessary. It implies a fore-structure (*Vor-Struktur* comprising *Vorhaben*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff*—fore-having, fore-seeing, and fore-concept), which Dasein uses to grasp reality, and only through which meanings become articulated. Therefore, entity's meaning—its Being-*something*—becomes possible due to the horizon of fore-structures thrown ahead by understanding. And eventually ontology is possible only as interpretation or hermeneutics. This tough tie between Being and meaning is not accidental. It stems from Heidegger's project as such: to inquire into the meaning of Being.

⁶ Macquarrie and Robinson's translation is "potentiality-for-Being".

Being therefore is always meaningful (which the word ontology—discourse on Being—already indicates). Each time when there is something, there is a meaning, and there is understanding.

Here we find two dimensions of Being important for the following. On the one hand, the event of Being consists in laying down a horizon(s) allowing any meaning whatsoever to appear at all. On the other hand, the event opens up the very structure of meaningfulness and in this sense consists in the very fact that there is meaning. That Dasein is Being-the-there means precisely that it is able to be in such a way that there are meanings. This allows Heidegger to say that there is a voice of Being and that it is a response to this voice that opens up the possibility of Being at all. Therefore, event “contains” the fact of meaningfulness, its concrete (namely, horizontal) structure and a set of particular horizons. Logically, meaningfulness does not necessarily implies horizons. Moreover, as we shall see, the postmodern theory of community is claimed to rest exclusively on the fact of Being without any further qualifications. It is not easy, however, to keep the fact of meaningfulness apart from the structure of meaningfulness. For instance, Nancy sometimes fails to do so, as I hope to demonstrate.

Another important trait of Being according to Heidegger is its mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*—in each case belonging to *me*⁷). Being thus always implies someone (since it must be performed by someone). It is a human being (in the form of consciousness, Dasein, etc.) who performs the event of Being. One can even say that human being is no more than this performing. Performing designates the fact of Being’s always happening to *me*. This is not to claim that Being is in any way “created” by subjectivity, however one understands the latter. Rather the event is a “happening” wherein everything—subject, object, their relation, and the “happening” itself—happens. There is so far no activity or

⁷ I do not know how to avoid personal pronouns in the contexts such as this one. To distinguish

passivity of the subject. The event precedes both, or, as Levinas put it, we are dealing with the “passivity, more passive than any passivity.” Accordingly, performing does not denote any deed whatsoever that lies within the sphere of the subject’s power. The subject, if any, is constituted precisely in the same event, and performing is its very constitution and definition.

To sum up, three points of Heidegger’s approach to Being are essential for the following exposition. (1) The relational character of Being: it is a relational part of the structure, the other part of which is entity. It is a relation (rather direction, “towardness”) toward entity⁸. (2) The specific character of the “Being of Being”. When there is something, there is at the same time the *there is* itself, that is, the very fact of Being or, more exactly, the event of Being. This indicates the singularity of event and we shall see, for example, that this is the main meaning of singularity in Nancy’s works. As I have already pointed out, *there is* has the double structure of the happening of meanings and meaningfulness (or of the signified and significance). (3) The mineness of Being, its in each case happening to *me*.

Heidegger’s fundamental ontology found in *Being and Time* is extremely elaborate and rich in detail. For my purposes, a more schematic variant will suffice—the one that I shall call the ontology of event. This ontology deals with the Being of meaningful entities (which means all entities whatsoever). It conceives of Being transitively as Being towards entities. The latter, in turn, is thought as the event of entities’ (and Being’s itself) coming to Being. The event is always *mine*, always happens to *me*. Beside that, meanings in the ontology of event have the horizontal structure, which means that they are grounded in some embracing system of meaningfulness or significance. What exactly the structure of meaningfulness is—Dasein’s abilities-to-be, founding actions, referential system of signs,

them from the pronouns referring to myself, the author, I shall write them in italics.

narratives, or whatever else—is not specified. But the dependence of meanings on horizons makes them potentially plural in the sense that the same entity may be engaged in various contexts and thereby has a number of meanings at the same time. Although meaningfulness in a way precedes meanings, its structure comes up in the same event. The event is the absolute beginning in the sense that everything it comprises is brought forth in the event itself. This, however, does not prevent the event from having internal temporal structure.

Such is the ontology of event, and I have to show in the following text that it is the implicit (and at times explicit) ontology of the postmodern theory of community. Comprehended as event, Being is inseparable from time. This connection is more complicated than a simple succession of events in the course of time, and we need to discuss it carefully.

1.2 Time

Time belongs perhaps to the deepest structures of human experience and Being. It is not by chance that Husserl saw in temporality the basic structure of consciousness. Heidegger claimed that Being is in the final analysis time. Levinas spoke of diachrony and time as fundamental ties with the other. Psychoanalysis keeps talking about repetition when discussing the most fundamental structures of the human psyche. As for the ontology of event, temporality cannot but play a significant role in it. Indeed, event is the coming to Being, movement from “there was not” to “there is” (and to “there will not be”). I shall rely on the logic of this movement as it appears in Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1991). Although postmodern philosophy cannot join the whole Husserlian project of the science of consciousness, it is to a large extent indebted to his analysis of temporality. Temporal structures discovered by Husserl—or, more

⁸ Perhaps “intentionality” would be more precise.

precisely, the structure of diachrony which Levinas recognised in *Zeitbewußtsein*—often provide a conceptual scheme for grasping signification, significance, and the relational network of the signified. This is why I devote a relatively large space to the depiction of these structures.

In *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* Husserl examines intentional structures in the experience of time as such. He starts with considering enduring objects and takes a tone or melody as an example. According to Husserl, an enduring object is experienced as a unity of primary impression (*Urimpression*) in the now(*Jetzt*)-point and primal memory—retention (and also primal anticipation—protention; but it does not play essential role in Husserl's book). Retention holds the now that has just been. This does not mean that retention modifies the previous now through, for instance, transposing the actual now into memory:

Retention is not a modification in which impressional data are really preserved, only in modified form: on the contrary, it is an intentionality—indeed, an intentionality with a specific character of its own. When a primal datum, a new phase, emerges, the preceding phase does not vanish but is 'kept in grip' (that is to say, precisely 'retained'); and thanks to this retention, a looking-back at what has elapsed is possible. The retention itself is not a looking-back that makes the elapsed phase into an object: while I have the elapsed phase in my grip, I live through the present phase, take it—thanks to retention—'in addition' to the elapsed phase; and I am directed towards what is coming (in a protention) (Husserl 1991, 122).

There is therefore the irreducible temporal gap between the now and its retention. The retained now is by no means "the now that was actual in the past." Nor is it this now's modification. In a certain way, the retention retains its own now that has been, different

from the now that has been “in reality.” This duplication of nows leads to diachrony that I shall discuss a little later. Furthermore, retention holds not only the now that has been but also all previous retentions:

...each later retention is not only continual modification that has arisen from primal impression; each is also continual modification of all earlier continuous modifications of that same initial point (Husserl 1991, 31).

As Husserl put it, we have a tail of retentions each holding in itself modifications of all previous retentions. The head of this tail is the primal impression temporally separated from the tail itself. In fact, according to Husserl, any constitution of objectivity—as well as self-consciousness—becomes possible thanks to this feature of retention. Any meaning in consciousness is derived from the relationships between temporal phases kept by retention. The latter thus is a referential system that determines all meanings within consciousness. Retention contains everything presented to consciousness, whereas primal impression appears as an indefinite and purely negative source-point separated from the “field of meanings” but guaranteeing somehow its unity and consistency (indeed, it seems to be consistent only because all retentions have a common source in the primal impression). Levinas reveals here two structurally different temporalities (Levinas 1996). One is the succession of temporal phases that retention holds in itself. Although temporally separated, the phases are found in retention simultaneously, “in a flash.” This precisely points to another present not belonging to the line of succession. It is the presence of the succession itself. More exactly, it points to the time of the temporal gap between retention and primal impression. This time has perhaps only two dimensions—“what is” (with the whole differential structure of the temporally separated phases) and “what has been” (with the purely negative source-point of *Urimpression*). It is this structure that Levinas calls diachrony (Levinas 1998).

The status of primal impression in Husserl is ambiguous. On the one hand, each now consists of primal impression and primal retention. On the other hand, retention retains the now that has been (along with past retentions). But the primal impression of this past now, as we have seen, is not a modification of actual impression (having actually been in the past). While the latter does not have any determinations except its having-been, the former is divided in itself and is, in fact, the differentiated experience. The actual impression therefore plays the role of the origin (source-point) but its indefiniteness allows one to consider it as a pure negation of the retentive tail—something whence all retentions originate but which is not accessible to consciousness and has thus no further determinations. One can infer that the only function of primal impression in the Husserlian analysis is to designate the coming-to-Being, the originating. And this is the point of ambiguity. Should we understand the primal impression positively as production or negatively as a pure negation of “what is”? In a certain way, it is this ambiguity that is in the focus of the present work. The philosophy that I discuss transposes the Husserlian structure into the field of ontology (in doing so it relies on Heidegger) and then of community (not always, though, it is a transformation of the Husserlian problematic; one can find a similar structure elsewhere, for instance, in Saussure’s linguistics or in psychoanalysis). But the ambiguity remains and turns into the contradiction between community as pure negation of founding myth and as the negation “for the sake of something”.

The shift from temporality toward ontological problematic is made through the notion of *there is*. It signifies the fact of existence, the fact that there is something (*Daßsein* in its difference from *Wassein*). This fact, however, is grasped precisely as happening. It points therefore to the ontology of event, since event is coming-to-Being. What is the temporality of *there is*? In the ontology of event “there is something” amounts to “there is something meaningful”—simply because any “something” is meaningful. This implies the

disclosedness of meaningfulness or the relational network that makes meanings possible. In this case we face two kinds of precedence. On the one hand, horizons of fore-structures precede meanings, as long as the latter are acquired only through the reference to horizons. On the other hand, the very horizontal structure of meaningfulness must be disclosed beforehand. This latter disclosedness is irreducibly temporal, since it is the very event of bringing forth the former, i.e. the event of the emerging of meanings along with founding horizons. By contrast, horizons and meanings can be treated as in a certain sense simultaneous. Even when meaning is thought of as a result of a movement along a referential chain of signifiers, this chain is "kept in grip" altogether as a whole. In this last case we have the structure of diachrony. Indeed, there is a time of succession of the referential chain whose links, however, are presented simultaneously (as if held by retention or memory), and there is a time of the succession itself (as if from a primal source-point). I have to note, nevertheless, that the temporality of event is not necessarily diachronical. The horizontal structure might equally well be non-temporal, as, for example, in cases of the model of founding actions or that of figure-background. In this sense the ontology of event is supposed to differentiate the logic of meaning and of its appearing. The first might be temporal or non-temporal but it is always structured as something referring to something else (cf. Heidegger's definition of meaning as "something as something" [*etwas als etwas*] (Heidegger 1962, 32)). That which is referred to may reside in the past, present, or future but in any event temporality seems redundant here. This is to such an extent so, that this logic of meaning can be reduced to the "eternal presence." At the same time, the ontology of event aims to preserve precisely the irreducible time of happening, the time wherein the event of Being happens. Postmodern community is claimed to belong entirely to the second time and in this sense we might have kept to the discussion of it alone. I do not do so because it is postmodernism that often thinks meanings temporarily and, moreover, tends to identify the

two times of diachrony⁹ (I shall trace the impact of this identification on the theory of community). Discovering this conjunction is not always easy. For this reason I considered it necessary to give the elaborate description of diachrony. Two distinguished times correspond to two preconditions of meanings. While the former determines them on the side of the content, the latter conditions meanings by letting them be. I shall try to clarify what this means through the interpretation of Being and temporality in terms of language.

1.3 Language

Language, especially under the names of writing and literature, plays a significant, if not the decisive, role in the philosophy in question. It may be safely assumed that it is Being and time that are patterned after language, not the other way around. How then is language conceived of? In *Language and Death* (1991) Giorgio Agamben suggests a fruitful analysis of relationships between language, Being, and temporality. To a large extent, it makes clear the importance of language and literature in the philosophy that I consider and in the theory of community in particular. Agamben argues that the very problem of Being in Western philosophy became possible thanks to language's ability to signify its own Being. He relies on the understanding of demonstrative and personal pronouns by Émile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson. They comprehended these pronouns as the indication of an utterance. Such words (shifters in Jakobson's terminology) as *this*, *here*, and also *I*, *you* become endowed with a meaning only in the act of utterance and point to this act itself¹⁰. Utterance, therefore, not only says or means something, but also

⁹ Cf. the discussion of Derrida's *différance* below, p. 34.

¹⁰ In this sense the utterance itself is the event of differing between *here* and *there*, *I* and *you*, etc. Besides, from this point of view the Heideggerian interpretation of humanity as Da-sein or Being-the-there becomes possible thanks to the fact that *I* and *there/here* refer to the same reality, namely, to the instance of

shows; and shows precisely its own singular Being. This is the very Being of language, which cannot be named by language itself¹¹. For Agamben the connection of Being and language is not a mere analogy. The fact of Being is the fact of language, and ontology stems from the self-indication of speech. Agamben finds in both Being and language the intention to signify which he calls the Voice (with the capital V to distinguish it from a voice as sound). Language emerges from mere sounds (or voices) thanks to the intention to signify. Without it language simply does not take place. Intention, however, can be defined only negatively: no longer a sound but not yet a signification—a pure bearer of an unknown meaning. It goes without saying that, although Agamben speaks of sounds and voices, his analysis is applicable to any system of meanings as well. Indeed, it has to do with the existence of meaningfulness or significance as such. The intention to signify is a will to have meanings or to search for meaningfulness. This is why (since in ontology we deal precisely with meaningful entities) this structure is the structure of ontology. Moreover, it is the structure of the ontology of event. Indeed, the distinction Being-entity is comparable with that between uttering and the uttered. The first component in both pairs is the production of the second¹². In both cases we find a “having-been” as

Being.

¹¹ Agamben does not mention this, but for Benveniste this also points to the place of the subject in discourse. Benveniste defines utterance as the “utilisation of discourse (*langue*)” and writes: “In some way language puts forth ‘empty’ forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriate to himself and which he relates to his ‘person,’ at the same time defining himself as *I* and a partner as you. The instance of discourse is thus constitutive of all the coordinates that define the subject. . .” (Benveniste 1998, 50). This idea will contribute to the analysis below.

¹² Production is used here and throughout the text not in the sense of creating by the subject but in the sense of *poesis*, opposed to *praxis*; see (Agamben 1999, 68), where Agamben differentiates “*poesis* (*poiein*, ‘to pro-duce’ in the sense of bringing into Being) and *praxis* (*prattein*, ‘to do’ in the sense of acting).” The same goes for the term “act” and its derivatives: whenever I use them I mean meaningful

necessary but inaccessible condition of meaningfulness. And finally, in both cases *there is* or the fact of Being-meaningful coincides with the intention to signify of the silent Voice.

Agamben develops Heidegger's examination of Being and language. Dasein can be interpreted (as Agamben actually does) in terms of letting-language-be (that is to say, of the Voice). However, Heidegger's concept of significance has another dimension. Significance which I called horizon in the context of the ontology of event is also unspeakable, that is, can only be shown. Its unspeakability, however, does not amount to that of the instance of uttering. Horizons belong entirely to the structure of language and are conditions of possibility for its meanings. Thus utterance shows (but does not speak out) not only the fact of language but along with it the structure of language (its logic, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would say). Agamben in his book is focused exclusively on the former. He asks what meaningfulness regardless of any particular structure of meaning is. This immediately refers to the Voice, and my conviction is that it is in the interpretation of the Voice as a will to found a community with others that we have to look for primal communal ties. Moreover, as far as I can see, the postmodern theory of community tends to move in this direction. Nevertheless, the author whom I mostly discuss—Jean-Luc Nancy—in many cases does not differentiate the fact of meaningfulness and its structure, although claims to build his theory entirely on the former. This is why I shall carefully distinguish them. Other writers, of course, demand additional analysis, which I have not carried out. At the same time, the distinction is important for me, because the two types of language usage which I am primarily concerned with—using it for self-sustaining and for establishing communal ties—belong to the level of meaningfulness or letting-language-be.

actions as opposed to a mere doing (i.e. producing only itself).

Grasping their difference (which lies in that for the sake of what one lets language be) demands careful separating one from the other.

It will be more convenient for me to speak of saying instead of utterance (that is, following Levinas, to differentiate saying (*le dire*) and the said (*le dit*) (Levinas 1974, 6-9)). However, one needs to keep in mind that saying is not limited to spoken or even written words. It can equally well make use of gestures or another code. Saying is rather *poesis* in the sense of production that I have already referred to (see p.21). Moreover, saying/writing in this sense is not distinguishable from hearing/reading. Indeed, what counts here is the emerging of meaning or, better, meaningfulness out of meaningless material. It matters little whether this material “came out” of the writer or someone else. The event of understanding happens to a writer exactly as to a reader. This is why one can even speak of the absence of the author as such. The theory provided is simply incapable of grasping the reader-writer distinction¹³.

Therefore, the model of language that I shall use rests on the explication of saying and is as follows. In saying I shall discern:

(1) Signs, which I understand not in Saussure’s sense of the unity of signifier and signified but in the sense that Saussure would rather call material. That is, signs are sounds, gestures, figures on paper, and so on—all material, mnemonic, or other traces that the saying leaves.

(2) Gestures of saying or leaving traces in the first sense. They, or more exactly, their differences from one another, are not independent from the language as a whole (as the same Saussure among others taught us). Even the very existence of some of them may be the consequence of certain grammatical rules (such as writing a semicolon, for example). What is essential about gestures is their repeatability, which implies, of course,

¹³ In order to grasp it we shall need other means.

the ability of a listener/reader to recognise the same sign in differently pronounced sounds or differently drawn letters. Language's gestures provide, as it were, a common stock principally accessible for everyone's repetition.

(3) Significance or differential system of gestures. A gesture never appears alone, but always in a referential network of other gestures. Although these gestures are not performed, they are always present as something able to be done. This constitutes the horizontal structure of meanings. It belongs to this structure that the same saying can utilise different horizons and therefore simultaneously express several, at times contradictory, meanings. On the other hand, different signs can express the same meaning. Furthermore, another important characteristic of differential system consists in that it is precisely that of gestures, not of signs.

(4) The event of saying. As we have seen, it in no way amounts to a mere manipulation with signs or repetition. The event of saying includes the letting-language-be. In this case it implies the acceptance of significance. It dwells, in fact, between signs and meanings and is the very movement from the first to the second. The movement happens to someone, who is always *I*. And it is *me* who lets language be, even if "only" by *my* readiness to accept its meanings.

I am not in a position to judge the identification of Being and language (although it seems convincing to me), but it plays a crucial role in the postmodern theory of community. Moreover, I myself chose to adopt this viewpoint and to interpret this theory fully in terms of language. Obviously, this implies my agreement with the authors in point: the mystery of community is to be found, if at all, only in language conceived of as a milieu (or production) of meanings, but meanings produced for others. It may appear that the suggested theory is too simple to cover all nuances in the understanding of community in postmodernism. And it is simple, in fact. Nonetheless, it does meet the needs of the

present analysis. In order to see how it works let us proceed to the interpretation of Derrida's view on subjectivity and writing.

Chapter 2

Différance, Subjectivity, and Language Community

The subject is but an effect of language; there is no consciousness before and beyond signs; the subject is not present in its own signs. These statements by Derrida are immediate consequences of the structure of *différance* which excludes any presence and for the first order the presence of the subject. It is against the self-affection and self-presence (*presence à soi*) of the subject that this “neither word nor concept” is first of all set. However, if subjects are questioned, how can we think of their community? Any community in this case seems destined to be as anonymous as any system of language. Here, it is rather people who are assigned to no one’s community, not the other way around. My task in this chapter will be to demonstrate that *différance* does not exclude subjectivity. To be more precise, it excludes one sort of subjectivity whereas there are others that *différance* does not contest but instead presupposes. Thus the chapter proceeds in two steps. First, I shall describe other patterns of subjectivity that evade Derrida’s critique of presence. Second, I shall consider possible consequences of *différance* for the understanding of community. The next chapter in its turn will be devoted to the way that Nancy chooses to extend the idea of *différance* onto community.

2.1 *Différance* and the critique of presence

In the article entirely devoted to *différance* (Derrida 1999)¹⁴ Derrida starts with a

¹⁴ Unfortunately, in the final stages of my work I did not have at hand English translations of some necessary texts. Therefore, I was compelled to translate them from Russian. All those cases will be explicitly

reference to Saussure for whom

the signified is never present in a sign by itself, in that form of presence when it relates only to itself. Any concept is of necessity described in some chain or system in the framework of which it relates to other concepts through a regulate play of differences. (Derrida 1999, 136) (RT)

It is this play that Derrida calls *différance*. It is not a concept but a condition of conceptuality. It creates the very network of differences wherein concepts are only able to appear:

we shall call *différance* the movement through which language or any code as well as any referential system as a whole becomes “historically” constituted as a system, as a fabric of differences. (Derrida 1999, 137) (RT)

Derrida provides the following example: phonemes are never heard by themselves but always thanks to their mutual differences. At the same time their differences themselves cannot possibly be heard. This structure is opposed to the ontology of presence. The play of *différance* (that is, meanings that it gives birth to) is not determined by any presence in thought or intuition (the presence “in reality” is not the case in point at all), that is to say, by any presence beyond signs. On the contrary,

Presence is a determination or/and result existing in the framework of the system that is no longer the system of presence but that of *différance*. (Derrida 1999, 143) (RT)

One can ask, however, how is this derivative presence present within the framework of *différance*? What is its place in this system? We would think—and Derrida

sometimes gives occasion for this¹⁵—that presence appears when the results of differentiation—not only signifiers, but also signified, i.e. concepts—are considered self-sufficient and present on their own. As if something behind the differences is present, affects the differences, and determines them. However, the second aspect of *différance* resists this understanding. References to other signs turn out to be temporal:

Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only in the event that each element considered as “existing,” appearing on the scene of presence, correlates with something other, different from it, but retains at the same time the sign of already past and simultaneously remains open to the sign of its relations to the coming. (Derrida 1999, 138) (RT)

In this respect presence is similar to phonemes from the example above. It is never present on its own without reference to another presence. However, what immediately attracts our attention is the similarity between this structure and temporality as described by Husserl. Like there, past and future in this passage are not reducible to the modified present. This, in particular, does not allow this structure to be directly transferred onto the Saussurian model. Indeed, what else are other signs in his model if not a “modified present”? The Saussurian differential system is synchronic; all its differences are given simultaneously. Derrida goes further and applies Saussure’s idea to the temporal structure of the movement of signification. He puts temporal differences peculiar to the constituting movement in one row with differences within the constituted system. In what way can the constituting be transferred into the sphere of the constituted?¹⁶ As is known, in order to

¹⁵ For instance, the examples of differences on page 145 (intelligible-sensual, concept-intuition, culture-nature) speak rather for such an interpretation.

¹⁶ This question is in fact analogous to the one that Levinas posits when he speaks of making-present

demonstrate how this happens Derrida employs the concept of trace. The latter “retains in itself the experience of time” and thereby allows the constitution to appear in the sphere of the constituted. Derrida elaborates two major themes in order to clarify how the past is retained in trace: Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* and the concept of supplement. Freud’s notion of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) points to the re-considering of the psychic experience in late stages of human development¹⁷. It is this dependence of the past on the movement of constituting that is essential for Derrida. This phenomenon of the *appearing* of a new past points to what Levinas calls diachrony. Indeed, we have two ‘nows’. The first is constituted as different from past nows, whereas the second is the now within which all of them are constituted. To put it in other words, the first now is opposed to other nows, whereas the second is opposed to ‘non-now’ or non-Being. However, Derrida does not distinguish these temporal orders. Moreover, *différance* itself is essentially based on their identification as we shall see later (see p.34).

Another approach to the trace is connected with the concept of supplement or substitution. Presence is hidden and reveals itself only through a supplement. It emits, as it were, something that substitutes it (Derrida 1999, 148) because in itself it remains not self-sufficient. The substituted—that is, presence—stays in the past which, however, is produced by the movement of *différance*. We see that the trace not so much retains the experience of time as carries it out. The trace—along with *différance*—is a movement in

(*Vergegenwärtigung*) in Heidegger’s ontology. Derrida here follows the temporal logic of *Dasein*.

¹⁷ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis raise an objection against rendering this Freud’s term as “deferred action” (as the English *Standard Edition* does). They write: “Freud’s conception of *Nachträglichkeit* cannot be reduced to the notion of ‘deferred action,’ if we understand it as a temporal gap between excitation and response determined by the gradual accumulation of experience” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1996, 345) (RT). It is rather a post-action that inscribes the experience that could not earlier be endowed with a meaning into a new context. The prototype of such experience is trauma.

which the very difference between the substitution and substituted—that is to say, the signifier and signified—appears. This, of course, is in tune with Derrida's assertion of the irreducibility of temporality, but we should accentuate things differently. It is not the point that the articulated speech by itself is a trace or that the articulation by itself gives birth to the sign as a trace. *Différance* rather constitutes sign as a sign. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida formulates the question as follows: "What condition must discourse fulfil in order to 'signify' something?" (Derrida 1999, 169-70) (RT). He searches for an answer in the temporality of the trace. The temporal gap between saying and the said turns into the gap between the signifier and signified. At the same time, however, Derrida follows Saussure and understands the significance of signifiers through their mutual references within a referential system. According to this scheme, the differences between the signifying, signifier and signified are in fact equal to the intra-system differences (in other words, differences constituting for the fact of the system are identical with intra-system ones). *Différance* then is responsible for generating all language's differences. We could agree with this but in this case the question might be raised: Does Derrida not identify in *différance* two gestures of differentiation?

2.2 Two gestures of differentiation in *différance*

Différance as a movement of differing produces two sorts of differences. Those of the first one are between signifiers. They constitute the network of mutual references of signifiers. Unlike them, the differences of the second sort belong to the movement itself. They are between "parts" of the movement: signifier, signified, and the act of signifying. Therefore, the movement of differentiation can be viewed as constituting either a repeatable differential system of language or the very difference between repeating and repeated.

The distinction drawn helps us to give more details about Derrida's notions of trace and effacement. Their general definitions (the trace is a signifier that refers to the absent,

and the effacement is a retention of the experience of time) remain the same but specific meanings become different according to two meanings of differentiation. When the latter is considered as constituting the differential system of language, the trace appears as the reference of the signifier to other signifiers: any sign, symbol, text, etc. holds traces of other signs, symbols, texts, etc. These traces may be situated in the past and/or future (we have already seen the corresponding quotation on the page 28). The latter however belong to the constituted time rather than to the time of constituting. Furthermore, effacement in this case should be grasped as forgetting these references, that is to say, as forgetting the referential system wherein the signifier was established. This makes it possible for the gesture of repetition to be repeated independently of the established system. The phenomenon of *Nachträglichkeit* as well as the appearing of the signifier in different contexts becomes also possible thanks to such a forgetting. Moreover, this can explain one more meaning of trace found in Derrida's introduction to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*. This is the trace as remnants or residues of the experience that happened, was not understood, but nevertheless remains efficient in the repetition. This is a gesture that appears in the by now forgotten (or even repressed by means of metaphor and metonymy) differential system.

Other meanings of trace and effacement stem from the second meaning of differentiation. The trace now refers to the event of repetition. In this sense the whole differential system (insofar as signifiers are never established outside of such a system) becomes the trace of the event of its establishing. There is no other "signified" except this event. The logic of effacement works here, although it needs no *signatum* beyond repetition. Moreover, the event itself does not play the role of the inaccessible absent signified or presence 'behind the scene'. Its presence is of a specific sort—it must be performed in order to be (presented) at all. No non-presentable past is necessary here. Movement and reference to it are simultaneous. The event of establishing is the absolute

beginning (for this reason the logic of desire which I shall describe below does not work here as well). Effacement now denotes the releasing of the said in the act of saying (what Nancy often calls withdrawal). This independence of the said leads to the necessity to repeat the said if one wants to make it exist at all.

We see that repetition lies in the fundament of *différance*. We can isolate a “basic” level of *différance*, that is, the gesture that differentiates what is repeated and the act of repeating. This gesture consists in using a signifier (doing a gesture, uttering a word, drawing a hieroglyph). It is possible in turn only if the signifier is different from other signifiers, that is, other gestures, and therefore implies a differential system of gestures and the ability to discern between them. The possibility of automatic or meaningless repetition (for instance in the case of neurosis) demonstrates that repetition does not necessarily implies signification. At the same time, we are able to recognise here signifiers and signified and to track the logic of effacement and trace. Indeed, the gesture, even when it is produced for the first time, presupposes repetition. In this sense, it leaves a trace—that which allows one to consider the gesture repeatable or the same. Even if it is not fixed in speech or writing, it remains a signifier and settles apart from the repeated gesture. Fixed, it becomes a part of the written language, simultaneously poison and a “remedy for memory and wisdom” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274e-5b). However, what it signifies not only appears in the same gesture but is identical to it. The gesture of repeating a particular signifier is this very signifier. We can speak here of archi-writing as the gesture that (archi)writes by the very fact of its repeatability or distinguishability from other gestures. On the other hand, the gesture is not fully present in what is left. It is “effaced” from its own result. But precisely this effacement—that is to say, the possibility of repetition or the difference between repeating and repeated—forms a sign in which the repeated serves as a signifier and the act of repeating as a signified. This structure of repetition is present in *différance* as the movement of differentiation.

Although this description is similar to Derrida's, it does not follow it in all details. First of all, for Derrida the concept of trace connotes something that happened but was not understood. Like traces precipitated in the unconsciousness, they gain their interpretation in post-action: something happened, remained obscure, and could not even be remembered but suddenly shows up and becomes meaningful. However this repetition, it seems, does not contain what Derrida calls "the past that has never been present." The latter is not very clear in Derrida. Borrowed from Levinas, for whom it designates the past of *Urimpression* in Husserl's description of time-consciousness, in Derrida it points sometimes to the past of the differing act and sometimes to the signified preceding this act. This ambiguity extends over the concepts of trace and signification. By separating the level of repetition, I try to clarify this moment (by means of some sort of "deconstruction" of *différance*). Repetition, as it is described here, presupposes only the difference between repeating and repeated which implies the differential system of the repeated referring to one another, leaving a trace, and a gesture of differentiation generating the system of the repeated. This repetition demands no "non-presentable past," since the act of repetition (which is the act of using a signifier) comes to awareness in the very moment of its performing (speaking, reading, writing...). It is non-presentable, but it is not in the past. This does not contradict its non-determination and dependence on the game of signifiers, Derrida's main assumption. There are no acts that precede signs and are signified by them backwards (as a "supplement"). What is indeed presupposed by the gesture is a set of other gestures. However, they are not situated in the past or future. They are possible gestures. What is brought about in any gesture's performing is a system of possible gestures which compose in the final analysis the referential system of significance. Generally speaking, possibilities belong to the present, and assigning them to the past or future is rather contingent. To be more precise, they belong to the constituted time. If they are assigned to some past or future, they are the past or future of the constituted time. Therefore,

differences of the referential system have nothing to do with the temporal gap between repeating and trace. Nevertheless, Derrida explicitly identifies them. This means that he blends in one the two considered meanings of trace and effacement.

2.3 Joining two times of diachrony in *différance*

As we have already seen, Derrida starts with Saussure's idea of a differential system but includes into this system the temporal differences of the movement of differentiation. One could even say that this is the core idea of *différance* as such. It is this interpretation that allows Derrida to qualify *différance* as differing-deferring. *Différance* comprises temporal and spatial dimensions and is even, as Derrida puts it, "time becoming-spatial and space becoming-temporal". However, this becomes possible only because he identifies two times of diachrony—the constituted time and the time of the event of constituting. In order to demonstrate this I shall start with Derrida's analysis of the Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl's description of time-consciousness (*Zeitbewußtsein* translatable as both "consciousness of time" and "time as consciousness") remains the basis of Derrida's contemplation on *différance*. This determines its possibilities and problems.

Derrida's approach to phenomenology is guided by Saussure's linguistics. Derrida utilises the latter's theory of sign systems in order to demonstrate phenomenology's insufficiency. His whole intention is to undermine the idea of objective experience. Instead, language is supposed to be the only experience and basis of knowledge. For this reason Derrida starts directly with the analysis of language within the foundation of phenomenology. As is well known, according to Husserl phenomenologists need to perform *epoche*, that is a special act of excluding everything not belonging to the sphere of experience that Husserl called phenomenal. To delimit this sphere he starts with the notion of expression. The latter implies and bears a meaning because it "means something to say". Therefore, such experience as pain or pleasure is excluded from the scope of

phenomenology. By contrast, expression expresses an implicit meaning preceding it, even though appearing only through it. Being in a sense hidden, this meaning is nonetheless fully accessible to the subject in its inner life. It is this claim that becomes the target of Derrida's criticism. In the course of his analysis he reveals a weak point in phenomenology and proposes a solution to deal with it. However, not unaware of this weakness, Husserl himself in his later writings provides his own solution, different from Derrida's. To me, Husserl's own approach seems more productive, but, as we will see, Derrida's elaboration is especially interesting in the context of the present work.

Thus, the matter in question is the usage of signs. Derrida shows that the implicit pattern of phenomenological meaning is "living speech," which he opposes to writing. Their difference, in the final analysis, lies in the relation of the subject to the expressed meaning. Living speech, as well as life itself, becomes living only insofar as the subject possesses fully the meaning that it means to express. In contrast, according to Derrida, written language carries within itself a network of meanings which the subject not only does not possess before the expressive act but also cannot possibly appropriate by means of this act (and by any other means as well). Constituted as a referential network of signs, language holds in itself meanings prior to any possible usage of them and moreover dictates to a large extent, if not totally, the rules of any such usage. This is why, according to Derrida, phenomenology has no right to speak of the intentionally constituted meaning. The latter is but a fiction. Reasonable, as it is, the argument, however, does not cover the whole problematic.

Indeed, Husserl discerns three elements in an intentional act: the object of intention, the intentional act (*noesis*), and its intentional content (*noema*). In expression, which is certainly a language act, we have in addition signs or words. Husserl considers this fact as an unimportant complication because he presumes a strict parallelism between intentional acts and words used for their description. After all, it is this parallelism that makes Husserl

believe that phenomenology can be developed as a pure descriptive science, a pure description of the subject's intentional life. The essential feature of the intentional act is that it can be repeated and therefore named and idealised. Moreover, in many cases it can be repeated voluntarily, making it possible to mean anything at all (cf. Derrida 1973, 34-5). 'Voluntarily' here designates nothing but the act's independence from the object (more exactly, from its Being or truth): the meaning of expression exists even when the object is absent, and this is the first step in the emancipation of language (the second one being its emancipation from the subject). It is important to note that according to Husserl noema and noesa are experienced differently. Intentional acts are accessible through a special sort of intuition, which a phenomenologist gains as a result of *epoche*. This transcendental intuition has no object, it functions according to the pattern of vision: we see something and at the same time perceive the act of vision itself. Accordingly, objects are perceived through intentional acts directed toward them, whereas the acts themselves do not demand any further intentional acts to be perceived. They are immediately given as performed actions. Later Husserl abandoned this conception and worked out its more complicated version. According to this, any actual meaning depends on the horizon of potential experience. Its limiting case is the life-world (*Lebenswelt*)—the ultimate horizon of all human meanings, the place where people always already dwell. However, the primary horizon appears as temporality. It is described in *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (see p.16 et seq. for the discussion). Thus any meaning appears like in Derrida only in the context of a differential system which is fundamentally temporal. In this sense Derrida detects the equivalence between Husserl's time-consciousness and Saussure's structure of signs and then identifies them. What happens to diachrony?

Derrida's discussion of Husserlian phenomenology shows very clearly that he does not distinguish sufficiently between two times of diachrony. Indeed, on the one hand,

spacing of *différance* is described as obviously belonging to the time of event.

It becomes even more obvious with his reference to Heidegger whose *Anwesen* is precisely a movement of inner temporality. Nevertheless, at times Derrida takes one as the other. We can find many examples of this. In a footnote we find the following passage:

...temporalization taken as the openness of the present upon an outside of itself, upon *another* absolute present. This being outside itself proper to time is its *spacing*: it is a *proto-stage* [*archi-scène*]. This stage, as the relation of one present to another present *as such*, that is, as a nonderived re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung* or *Repräsentation*), produces the structure of signs in general as “reference,” as being-for-something (*für etwas sein*) and radically precludes their reduction. (Derrida 1973, 84-5)

Two points are worth mentioning here. The first is the description of the sign’s temporality as being-for-another-sign. Actually this is what Saussure meant when he spoke of the referential nature of signs. The second, however, is a notable identification of spacing—*différance*’s temporal component—with the relation of one present to another. Moreover, later on in the text Derrida clearly identifies this relation with phenomenological retention:

The process by which the living now, produced by spontaneous generation, must, in order to be a now and to be retained in another now, affect itself without recourse to anything empirical but with a new primordial actuality in which it would become a non-now, a past now. . .

The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. . . . the self of the living present is primordially a trace. (Derrida 1973, 85)

Thus, Derrida understands retention as retaining the past living present, “past now”. But this is not exactly so (although it seems at times to be Husserl’s own standpoint). What is retained in retention is not the “past now” but rather “the past in the now”, that is, the past as it is presented in the now. Retention comprises all the chain of such “pasts” along with all past retentions. Retention essentially and completely belongs to the living now. Levinas calls this feature of phenomenological temporality *Vergegenwärtigung*, making-present or turning-into-present¹⁸. But the connection of ‘nows’ is not a retention or representation. It is rather a looking for sense or establishing of ties. Derrida is right in that there is an essential gap between the actual present and its representation. It is experienced in the present as a trace, a reference retained in the present itself. But this trace is in no way retention, as Derrida wishes to indicate. Temporalisation is not a reference to another present. It points rather to the non-present, non-now.

Derrida applies the Saussurian theory of sign systems to the Husserlian temporal organisation of experience, in order to undermine the presence of experience. Thus he introduces the idea of writing. He starts by denying the presence of signs (Derrida 1982, 26-8). Each element has traces of other elements in the chain or system. Spacing is this relation of elements. It is temporal because each element refers to other elements in the past or future. Thus, Derrida claims, we have a production of intervals, “generative moment in the play of differences.” *Différance* is a transformation, he concludes. This temporal production of intervals might be viewed in two ways. It can be the play of retentions and protentions in the internal time, but it might also be the production of these retentional relations in the external one. Derrida does not distinguish between these two situations. Perhaps he is right but this certainly demands a more detailed explanation.

¹⁸ The word is borrowed from Husserl himself. Derrida applies it as well, as we have just seen. The usual rendering of *Vergegenwärtigung* is ‘representation’. For example, the German version of Levinas’ work *Diachrony and Representation* is called *Diachronia und Vergegenwärtigung* (Levinas 1991).

Anyway, Derrida's thesis about time turning into space appears to be ungrounded, at least as far as his understanding of spacing is concerned.

Therefore, Derrida mixes up two times of diachrony and two gestures of differentiation in *différance*. In spite of this I shall explicitly distinguish them with the only goal to delimit the gesture of producing "extra-system" differences between signifier, signified, and signifying. It is in this sphere that I shall look for the subjectivity escaping Derrida's criticism of presence. But before that let us look closer at his vision of subjectivity.

2.4 Subjectivity: Derrida's approach.

From Derrida's standpoint the subject—moreover, the subject in the first place—is nothing but an effect of *différance*. With reference to Saussure, to his idea of the subject as a function of language, Derrida writes:

It is presupposed thereby that the subject (identifying itself or even conscious of its own personality, that is, possessing self-consciousness) is described by language, that it is a "function" of language. It becomes a speaking subject only thanks to subjecting its speech . . . to a system of linguistic rules constructed as a system of differences or the universal law of *différance*. (Derrida 1999, 141) (RT)

Derrida's answer to the question of the existence of self-consciousness before and beyond signs—that is to say, "the self-consciousness of the subject's presence in the silent intuitive consciousness" (Derrida 1999, 142) (RT)—is negative. Nevertheless things are not that certain.

Emile Benveniste while discussing the place of subjectivity in language relates it not to the sense of oneself but to the reality of the instance of discourse (*instance de discours*), that is, to the very fact of speech (Benveniste 1974, 292-301) (RT). Personal

pronouns (of which the most important is *I*) as well as deictic words (*now*, *here*, etc.) refer not to the corresponding concepts but to the moment of their uttering. Developing this theme, Giorgio Agamben asks what is said in every speech act by the very fact of saying. For all that, saying does not amount to a mere repeating of words. Language appears in the transition from indicating to signifying, from the articulated sound to the meaningful word. As we have already seen, Agamben calls this double negation (no longer a sound but not yet a word) the Voice (capitalised in order to discern it from the voice as a mere sound) and interprets it as the intention to signify (that very *vouloir dire* which Derrida subjects to criticism) or will to have language (66). This Voice therefore is accomplished as the effacement of sound, forgetting the origin, that is to say, as trace. Returning to Derrida, does he take into account this type of subjectivity?

Let us start with a long quotation from *Speech and Phenomena*:

Let us consider the extreme case of a "statement about perception." Let us suppose that it is produced at the very moment of the perceptual intuition:

I say, 'I see a particular person by the window' while I really do see him.

It is structurally implied in my performance that the content of this expression is ideal and that its unity is not impaired by the absence of perception here and now. Whoever hears this proposition, whether he is next to me or infinitely removed in space and time, should, by right, understand what I mean to say. Since this possibility is constitutive of the possibility of speech, it should structure the very act of him who speaks while perceiving. My nonperception, my nonintuition, my *hic et nunc* absence are expressed by that very thing that I say, by *that* which I say and *because* I say it. This structure will never form an 'intimately blended unity' with intuition. The absence of intuition—and therefore of the subject of the intuition—is not only *tolerated* by speech; it is *required* by

the general structure of signification, when considered *in itself*. It is radically requisite: the total absence of the subject and object of a statement—the death of the writer and/or the disappearance of the object he was able to describe—does not prevent a text from ‘meaning’ something. On the contrary, this possibility gives birth to meaning as such, gives it out to be heard and read. (Derrida 1973, 92-3)

One can see how in this passage Derrida repeatedly slides from the “meaning for me” to the “meaning for another” and to “other’s meaning for me”. But these are completely different meanings and Husserl devoted many pages to explaining how the second one is constituted as the third, i.e. as the first at bottom: ultimately every meaning is a “meaning for me,” because only in the inner life of consciousness may any unity of meaning whatsoever appear¹⁹. Derrida, on the contrary, argues that there is meaning in the written text itself. But it is also true that any meaning comes into Being only through its “animation” by a speaking subject (Does it not consist in providing a spectre of potentialities for any actual meaning?). Dead languages have no meanings until someone starts looking for them. Which is not to say, of course, that the subject produces this meaning or possesses it. However, Derrida’s point is that in fact meaning is constituted by language (by its play of differences), whereas the subject’s “animation” consists merely in complying with its rules, and the subject itself is but an effect of the play. We need, therefore, to examine more closely the relationship between the subject and language.

The examination of the word ‘I’ seems to clarify these relationships, and Derrida undertakes it. He quotes Husserl: “In solitary speech the meaning of ‘I’ is essentially realised in the immediate idea of one’s own personality” and continues, “Even supposing that such an immediate representation is possible and actually given, . . .” (Derrida 1973,

¹⁹ Thus, the ‘meaning of the text’ can serve as all of them depending on who repeats the text.

95). The phrase clearly shows his misunderstanding, because Husserl does not mean any “representation” at all. This idea of ‘I’ is a—truly immediate—understanding of one’s Being, one’s using of the word ‘I’, if one wishes. *I* is never the object of representation, and Husserl is but Kant’s disciple in this point. This is why Derrida’s phrase “. . .in the absence of intuitive presence—here, in the absence of myself” misses the point: “myself” is never “intuitive presence,” i.e. intentional content. It is noesis and never noema, and being such, it is perceived without objectifying. Moreover, Derrida changes the issue slightly. Instead of discussing the presence of living speech, he speaks of the intentional object. To put it differently, instead of the presence of intuition, he discusses the presence of the object of intuition, that is to say, instead of saying he discusses the said.

Derrida’s reference to the subject’s death also appears misleading. He claims: “Whether or not I am alive, ‘I am’ ‘means something’”, “there is no need to know who is speaking in order to understand or even utter it [the word “I”—OD]” (Derrida 1973, 95). It is true, but what is this “understanding or even uttering?” (And why does Derrida put them in the same row?) Unlike intention, the intuition of ‘I’ cannot be “without an object” because it is its own “object.” Undoubtedly, “I am” means something regardless of anyone’s death and can, moreover, have many different meanings. But all these meanings can be only for *me*—this is what Husserl describes as “the immediate idea of one’s own personality.” The intuition of ‘I’ designates the presence of meaning itself or the presence of significance, but not the presence of “what is meant,” and it is precisely this presence that Derrida aims to contest. This is hardly possible with the argument considered, and, actually, Derrida has more powerful instruments, which I shall discuss later, but they also fail for the same reason: presence in phenomenology has nothing to do with objectification and representation. In “uttering ‘I’” one should distinguish between “what is uttered” and the uttering itself. The former belongs to the differential system of language, whereas the latter does not. The situation here is analogous, if not identical, with Noam Chomsky’s

distinction between competence and performance, used by Judith Butler in her concept of gender as performance (Butler 1990).

Derrida's point is clear and reasonable. We can use language even without knowing its meanings. Signifiers can be repeated regardless of any presence supposed to guarantee their meanings. But even if we accept Derrida's criticism of presence, there remain different models of "significance without presence". Two of them will be important for the following elaboration. As we shall see, they correspond to two types of subjectivity which I shall call that of involvement and engagement.

2.5 Subjects of involvement and engagement

The event is in every case *mine*. It belongs to *me* in the sense of happening, not appropriation. *I* am irreducibly involved into the happening of the event. This subjectivity of involvement differs from that produced by discourse²⁰. Derrida's criticism of the presence of subjectivity aims at the latter and neglects the former. Subjectivity comes to Being as involvement and the place of repetition. Being so it is always *my* subjectivity. Furthermore, involvement implies the possibility of decision. Although *I* always already find *myself* involved, *I* can decide on further involvement, at least negatively. This power of rejection is granted to *me* by the event itself, more exactly by its repetitive character. Having been created by the event, *I* remain free for another event or for the absence of events. We encounter here precisely the structure of trace (or withdrawal, as Nancy prefers to name it). But unlike a mere sign, the subject is an "active" trace of the event. This

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur in this respect distinguishes between the subjectivity of *idem* and *ipse* (Ricoeur 1992). The first is constructed by narratives, whereas the second stems from the very fact of using narratives. As a result, although *I* cannot know *who I* am, I know that *I am*, that something is happening here, where *I* am ("What I am is as problematic as that I am is apodictic" (Ricoeur 1995, 371) (RT)). *I* am the very place of this "happenstance".

“activity” consists first of all in the agreement to become involved or in letting a discourse be. There is a point whence involvement is impossible without *my* offering the body for that. This is the point where the repetition of discourse ceases merely to happen. Although *I* still in no way determine what happens, it needs *my* participation in order to exist, and thus *I* do determine the fact of its happening. Agreement therefore contains a negative aspect—refusing a mere repetition, transiting from a sound to signification, from *Es* to *Ich*. This is the gesture of refusing meaningless repetition (which is therefore acknowledged as such) in favour of meaning (or nothing). This refusing may be accompanied by the refusing of the current discourse. At least, this possibility to deny its current conditions points primarily to the subject of involvement and its activity. But even without this denial the agreement is marked by negativity, since it refuses to merely repeat. But what then prompts *me* to let language be? What prompts *me* to speak? With this question we come to the subjectivity of engagement.

In Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 2000) a mere constituting of the differential system turns out to be insufficient for presence. One more condition is necessary. Derrida calls it the desire directed to presence (Derrida 2000, 171). This desire is insatiable and structured as a lack, but the lack of what has never taken place (Derrida 2000, 255). *Différance* generates what it immediately prohibits and makes impossible (Derrida 2000, 294). This logic as well as the very choice of the term “desire” refers, of course, to Lacan. Ellie Raglang in her book on death in psychoanalysis describes the structure of desire in Lacan’s works in the following way:

One of Lacan’s discoveries reveals the ego as itself a defence, or means of resisting the truth of unconscious desire. Indeed, the ego is constructed *for the purpose* of minimizing the anxiety produced by losses that constitute a void place within being and body... [T]he ego is driven to annul the anxiety produced by the unbearable pain of lack and loss. In this

context, it makes sense to argue that the infant's first corporal satisfaction or pleasurable sensations give rise to desire—not to static fantasy hallucinations—as a *dialectical* call to the other (such as an infant's cry). This “demand” is the desire for connection that Freud called Eros, that Lacan called libido or *jouissance*. Thus seen, drives are themselves constituted on a paradoxical basis, both initiating the cut and attempting to annul the effects of primordial losses that make the primary human goal that of retaining illusions of consistency. (Ragland 1995, 27)

Therefore, the inaccessibility of *jouissance* is not so much in conflict with desire but rather itself at its service. Desire appears as the desire to be or, as Lacan put it, “not to be nothing.” In this logic—coming back to Derrida—the hidden and inaccessible presence proves to be a condition of language's existence. This means not only that language stands on the negative fundament but also that this negativity is not reducible to that of originating in the sense of transition from non-Being to Being. To put it differently, the repetition of the articulated system is not sufficient for turning it into the system of significance. The ability to repeat and discern words is not yet sufficient for endowing them with meanings.

To move further we need to recall the Freudian distinction between satisfaction and identification (Freud 1920). Freud associates the latter with the death drive (“something demonic”) and repetition compulsion. It can operate independently of and even contrary to any search for satisfaction. Although this concept is disputable and has not been fully adopted by the post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan makes use of it in order to develop his understanding of desire. Thus desire, as the desire to repeat is not necessarily connected with satisfactory experience. It is the repetition for the sake of repetition, desire to be, regardless of any possible dissatisfaction. It is language that allows this desire to be played out. Signs, fantasies, *mis-en-scènes* are capable of being repeated without a reference to

any reality whatsoever except themselves. This is a completely artificial world in the sense that it has nothing to do with any “natural” signified, whether it be need, experience of satisfaction, material objects, etc. *Différance* refers precisely to this world. But here we need more subtle investigation.

Let me note that the rejection of presence, as Derrida describes it, does not necessarily exclude any reference to “nature.” The thing in point is the illusory character of any certain signified supposedly preceding language. However, the Freudian model of drive depicts the unstructured and undetermined force or pressure that looks for a satisfaction but does not offer in advance any particular way or method for it. The drive pushes out here rather than toward there (in Lacan’s wording, “the drive kicks us to the arse”). This does not contradict Derrida’s critique of presence. However, it is difficult to understand from Derrida’s texts what precisely he thinks of this matter because it is not clear whether he speaks of the presence before the movement of *différance* or in its very moment. At first glance the moment of the act is itself problematic for Derrida. Nevertheless, he grasps the gesture of differentiation as something simultaneous—what is present on the scene of presence refers no doubt to the past and future but this very reference is present “instantly” (see above about the evidence of *différance* and its temporality). Anyway, we can distinguish between two types of repetition depending on its relation to the “extra-discursive reality.” Both conform Derrida’s refusal of determination or motivation by a pre-sign signified. However, one of them remains bound, as it were, with the “pre-sign implying no signified” that is with satisfaction, sense of conformity, etc., as if something finally obtains satisfaction in the found expressive form (even if in a post-action). Unlike this, the other repetition, to which Derrida is close, does not have even this support. It is completely artificial. This is a part of language that has no signified except the very acts of repeating or using signifiers. It is connected to “reality” through the

ability to perform one or another gesture²¹, rather than through the correspondence with some “real content.” Nonetheless, both repetitions are in a sense artificial and this is what *différance* calls our attention to. The ability to repeat, not a connection with the signified lies at their basis²².

In a broader sense repetition may be performed for itself or for the sake of something else, but in both cases it is engaged, so to say, in some project. I shall call the corresponding subjectivity that of engagement. Thus this subjectivity does not merely repeat discourse or uses language. It does so for the sake of something. How precisely the logic of this “something” looks, is a specific problem with which I am not concerned here. Instead, I shall take two examples of engagement important for the exposition to follow. They have a direct bearing on the presence of the other and consequently community.

2.6 Engagement and the place of the other

As we have seen, *différance* generates a system of signifiers. There are different types of them. Some comprise a “static” (in the sense of belonging to the internal time) system which can be easily substantiated and turned into a “structure of the world”—objects and state of affairs. Others are the signifiers, such as personal pronouns, that are unthinkable without a reference to the movement of repeating (or saying). Derrida, as we have seen, while analysing the pronoun “I” does not take this feature into consideration. However, this sort of signifier denotes the structural elements of repetition, not the repeated. In other words, these gestures bear in themselves their own signification. For this reason, it is to them most of all that Derrida’s statements about the movement of *différance* belong. Above all that, a special group of signifiers consists of ones referring to the

²¹ We can recall here Heidegger’s *Seinkönnen* or possibly Wittgenstein’s *Sachverhalten*.

²² It is possible to repeat mistakes despite facts even in empirical sciences. The phenomenon of repetition compulsion (*Wiederholungszwang*) also consists in repeating regardless of immediate pleasure.

situation of communication. On the one hand, they refer to the gesture of saying. But on the other hand, they seemingly presuppose a *mis-en-scène* with personages and roles. In what sense can we speak of the presence of these personages?

The issue then is repetition of a special sort, when language (or signifiers) is used for addressing and appealing. It breaks up into two asymmetrical situations corresponding to *my* appeal to others and their appeal to *me* (consequently, the appeal is always *mine*, or in Heidegger's words, assigned for *my* taking over). The first is *my* opening to others, that which Levinas denoted with the phrase *me voici* ("I am here"). It is a self-revealing, exposing, and indicating of one's own presence. The expression "I am here" contains exclusively the signifiers referring to the moment of saying (since Being also refers to this moment). Moreover, for *me*, it is not reducible to a mere attestation of the fact or even to the event of existence²³. As exposition, it gives birth to the world "there" in relation to which *I* am "here." However, what is this "there," if "here" denotes the very event of saying? Probably, another event. It can be *mine*, and its structure of repeating (with its feature to be in each case *mine*) directly presupposes this. However, as soon as it can be repeated, not only *I* can repeat it. In that case it will become somebody else's and turns into his or her self-indication. This is not yet the appeal directed towards *me* but already the openness of the other in her/his ability to speak, not necessarily meaningfully (with signification) but already responsibly. This apparition of the other, which Levinas calls the epiphany of the Face, demands speech in a wide sense, which is close to Being. The face by itself or merely eyes or even the human body as a whole prove to be a gesture of self-revealing. It cannot be reduced, however, to the self-revealing of phenomenon. Therefore, signs, which initially were my gestures (writing or reading, saying or listening), become, thanks to their exteriorisation in repetition, the gestures and speech of the other. The place

²³ Although it is reducible perhaps to the performative "I am saying" in the sense of "I am [a subject

of language, which initially was the place of my saying, becomes a public place. Undoubtedly, this has nothing to do with the mere fact of the precedence of language in relation to the subject as well as with the fact that language is always a “collective product.” Rather the point is in distinguishing two functions of language, two ways of its using regardless of how it originated or how speaking subjects learned to use it. The other is the one who speaks, which means that the other does not merely repeat signifiers but says. To recognize the other as a subject of speech means to transpose *my* own structure of the speaking being to her or him. This, in turn, means two things. First, the other uses language to address *me*. Second, language itself turns into something that not only *me* but also others can repeat. Language becomes a common field where ties of community are established.

Now let us come back to repetition, to what I called the completely artificial sphere. If repetition is not automatic²⁴, what prompts *me* to speak in this sphere? What prompts *me* to search for another language in the artificial world? Or what makes *me*, on the contrary, consent to repetition? There may be different answers. Perhaps it is the desire of consistency, as in Lacan’s psychoanalysis; or sophisticated criteria for empirical verification, as in the natural sciences; or correspondence with experience; or bodily satisfaction; or fidelity. All these contain *my* letting the coming to come (even if this letting is but a readiness of *my* “receiving apparatus”). Its concentrated expression is Nietzsche’s eternal return, “the highest form of approval which can be reached at all” (Nietzsche 1990, v.2, 743) (RT). However, the recognition of the other as a subject of speech goes further. Opening *myself* through language *I* expose *myself* to the other’s interpretation and judgement (either blaming or praising). Entering a common world means that *my* letting

of speech]”.

²⁴ To note it in passing, as soon as *I*, like Derrida, understand that *différance* lies in the basis of signification, repetition ceases to be automatic.

(as Heidegger's *lassen* can be translated) does not suffice. Language that provides a satisfaction to *me* can be unjust to the other and this prompts *me* to search for a new discourse. The other here is not merely the one who comes unexpectedly, destroys *my* world, and thereby forces *me* to look for a new language. This invasion happens, if at all, on the level of abilities (*Sein-* or *Redenkönnen*), whereas the other as the subject of speech does not change the structure of *my* world at all. He or she rather makes this world be not only *mine*. Neither new experience (like trauma), nor a movement for the sake of the movement, but striving for a common world prompts me to speak. What becomes important is not the event of speaking but the one who speaks. Responsibility for oneself (care or *Sorge*) turns into that for the other, and this does not require from the other to take over the form of presence.

Here the sphere of obligation appears distinct from that of Being. In this sphere such signifiers as good, evil, justice are always open to question—not because of their contingency but insofar as they are liable to agreement. The latter is not a consensus. Nor is it a universal remedy for all imaginable ethical problems. It is closer to Heidegger's *Verlaßtheit* and happens literally every minute, as long as people live in a world that they do not contest. On the other hand, it is neither unconscious nor automatic. It should be made explicit. The agreement or letting be is what distinguishes saying from mere repetition. In Heidegger's terms it is what distinguishes *Man* from the authentic (*eigentlich*) mode of Being. Letting be is a taking over (which is of course far from being always possible). However, I do not advocate here self-control as an ethical ideal to be acquired. At the same time, the recognition of the other's speech does not amount to the recognition of the unconscious (which Lacan calls the Other's speech). The point is not merely that the other speaks in *my* speech and desires in *my* desire. Rather the other is the one who addresses *me*. A deeper reason for not identifying the other's speech with unconsciousness is that the interpretation of the unconscious (which essentially implies

letting it speak) aims at the self-clarification and appropriation of the unconscious by means of language. This is why *I myself* am supposed to decide when to finish it, whereas recognising the other's ability to speak passes to her or him the right to cease the interpretation. Others become every bit as decisive an instance as *me*. It is precisely this that does not allow *me* to accept happily the world "as it is" and be satisfied with *my* interpretation.

Above all, agreement is not equal to argumentative dialogue. It may equally well be the consent to a play, being seduced, and so on. In this sense it does not at all prevent pain or disappointment. Its intention is to build a common world no matter what it is going to be and to take over the responsibility for this world.

Thus we can separate two sorts of the subjectivity of engagement in accordance with that for the sake of which the repetition is performed. In the first case it is performed for self-sustaining, that is to say, for gaining consistency in the movement of repetition. It is a flowing identity concerned with "not-being-nothing". "Nothing" here designates not death but rather mere repetition or repetition without decision. The subject speaks in order to sustain itself as a subject of speech and because there is no other way for that. Being so, its speech does not need or presupposes others. It is scientific in the broad sense of cognition. By contrast, in the second case the "aim" of the repetition is to establish ties with others. The subject says in order to address the other or to become open to his or her addressing. This does not exclude the constituting of the world but now the world becomes offered to others. From the very beginning it is a common world. Therefore, the logic of repetition is in both cases the same: repetition brings forth a differential system of significance (the world) at the same time leaving it unfounded. Both subjects may perform the same gestures and say the same words. But their goals are different. The first aims at the ceaseless opening of the world, its reinterpretation and saying "yes" to the coming future. The second seeks a community with others and offers a world, always being ready

to reject it for the sake of a new one.

How from this viewpoint does subjectivity look like in the case of Derrida's *différance*? We can recognise there at least four pretenders to the name of subject. The first is constructed by the narrative and is not actually different from any other constructed object in the world. The second appears already in the repetition as its very place (*Da-sein*). This is the subject of mineness, and pronouns and deictic words point to it. The third one is the subject of involvement who refuses mere repetition and decides on its own involvement. It is the subject of the desire to signify or to have a system of significance. It does not merely repeat but lets the repetition happen. The last, forth, subject appears as that of engagement. This subject is engaged in a project broader than letting significance be. It does desire language but not for itself. It uses language for the sake of something else. Of these broader projects, as I have already said, two will be the focus of the following study. The one is self-sustaining which uses language for creating an artificial environment, for leading, as it were, an artificial life no matter what it is. The other project uses language for establishing ties with others. It does not exclude creating an artificial world but considers it as offered to others. The corresponding subject addresses others and—ready to be judged—exposes itself toward them. We have come here to two basic functions of language. On the one hand, it can be used for constituting the world, knowledge, phantasm, or whatever—in brief, the world to live in. Generally speaking, others here play the roles of initiators into language or obstacles but not necessarily beings to live with. On the other hand, language is used for speaking toward someone, that is, appealing, asking, answering, proposing help, blaming, or praising. These functions do not necessarily exclude each other. Constituting the world may become addressing others when this world is offered to them.

Now, the question is which of these types of subjectivity does Derrida's thesis about the subject as an effect of the signifiers' play imply? Primarily, no doubt, it is the

first one. But what about the rest? It is necessary to say from the outset that the description of *différance* hardly allows one to answer the question unambiguously. Indeed, the subject is criticised as present, but presence has two meanings. It is something either preceding language, or simultaneous with it (although at the same time independent of it). But what can we say about the gesture of repeating a signifier? After all, is the gesture of *différance* itself present? Or we should speak of presence as a sort of gesture's substantivation, its "petrification" in trace? To what—the trace as a result or as a movement—does the "non-presentable past" precede? Derrida's texts are too uncertain to provide the answers. The situation remains vague and I am compelled to give my own interpretation.

Let us start with the note that Derrida does not pay attention to the subjectivity of repetition. *Différance* appears as an anonymous event in which everything, including the subject, emerges (and immediately disappears). But even if we agree with this and accept that the mineness of event points to the subject brought about by the event itself, the status of two other subjects (that of involvement and engagement) in *différance* remains uncertain. Derrida's critique of presence aims at the signified behind the play of signifiers. Well grounded, as it is in the case of essence-like items, this critique misses the point when it speaks of the event itself. Indeed, it does not say whether the event or signifiers are present. Even if we agree that there is nothing except traces that archi-writing leaves, what can we say about the acts of leaving traces themselves? Furthermore, the analysis of the signifying gestures (see section 1.3 in this thesis) shows that the traces that archi-writing implies are not exactly letters, written words, recorded sounds, and other "material" parts of saying. The trace is rather the whole system of significance: the gesture demonstrates the possibility of this system and in this sense leaves a trace. This reflects the fact that archi-writing is situated on the level of gesture (i.e. saying), not traces (i.e. the said). On this level there is no precedence and Derrida's logic of supplement and inaccessible past

ceases to work. This, in turn, changes the character of desire. Movement toward the inaccessible presence situated in the radically forgotten past is superseded by the desire to repeat that does not need any presence beyond the repeating itself. This desire is without a lack. What it wants to achieve is perfectly realisable. This may be illusory but it is precisely this illusion that this desire wants. To make a little pun, it has no illusions about the illusory character of its own doing. This fidelity to an illusion is a peculiar feature of the subjectivity of engagement. Hence, the subjectivity of engagement is not corrupted by Derrida's critique of presence. It dwells on the same level as *différance*, that of event. Repetition is necessary not because—in the supplementary manner—it provides an indirect access to presence. It is necessary because it *is* by itself the subject's Being or the tie with others. It is desired as such.

From the standpoint of the theory of saying Derrida grasps the temporality of saying, the distinction between saying and the said, and their independence. At the same time, he neglects the subjectivity of the one who not only speaks but, more importantly, decides on speaking, on its fact and goals. One can say that Derrida neglects the function of language different from the cognitive ones, its usage for the addressing and self-exposing. Hence, Derrida's *différance* is not able to account for both *my* and the other's subjectivity. Nevertheless, Nancy's theory of community can be to a large degree considered as an extension of *différance* to intersubjective relations. How in this case is he able to grasp the other? Having indicated the problem let us proceed to Nancy's presentation of community.

Chapter 3

Jean-Luc Nancy: Community of the Origin of Community

The most important characteristic of community, as seen by Jean-Luc Nancy, is its interruption or suspension or undoing or unworking. He derives this trait from the ontology of event: the very Being of a community makes immanence or totality impossible and the community itself inevitably plural. However, at the same time he provides another line of argumentation based on writing or literature understood as establishing communal ties. Although Nancy traces literature/writing back to ontology, it has, I believe, a value of its own, independent of Being and its derivatives. Therefore, I shall start this chapter with the concept of interrupted community and Nancy's ontological argumentation and end up with the communal meaning of writing and its independence from ontology. My aim is to demonstrate that what I call Nancy's distributive model of community is based not on the ontology of event, as he claims, but rather on a sort of interpersonal relation exceeding this ontology.

3.1 Community as distribution of singularities. Spatial metaphor

By a genuinely postmodern gesture Nancy denies community immanence. He finds a justification for this in ontology or, more precisely, in the irreducible distinction between Being and entities. I shall discuss this later in the chapter. Now, in this and the following section, I would like to demonstrate that one of Nancy's presentations of community (he in fact provides several), namely, its presentation as sharing and distribution, demands and rests on more than the impossibility of immanence. It presupposes the impossibility of

fusion with others, that is to say, the impossibility of the immanence of the social body or, even more exactly, the separation of *me* from the other.

Nancy begins by rejecting the notion of community as a number of individuals bound into community with external ties. He insists instead on the notion of singularity²⁵. The latter does not precede community. Singularities rather appear simultaneously and form a community in the very event of this appearance. They are not merely bound by aids of communal ties, they themselves belong to the order of ties, rather than what is tied: “Singularity never takes place at the level of atoms, those identifiable, if not identical identities; rather, it takes place at the level of the *clinamen*” (Nancy 1991, 6). The individual as a closed up identity is impossible. But in what sense? At the beginning of *The Inoperative Community* (Nancy 1991, 4-6) Nancy applies Hegel’s argument in order to show the impossibility of immanence or the impossibility of the Absolute (see Hegel 1977, 158-9). The argument states that the Absolute being, should it exist, must be absolutely separated from everything, that is, must be without relations. But Being without relations is itself a relation, and this makes the individual as such impossible and, according to Nancy, makes a being, of necessity, the being in community: “The relation (community) is, if it *is*, nothing else than what undoes, in its very principle—and at its closure or on its limit—the autarchy of absolute immanence” (Nancy 1991, 4). Roots of community are seen in the impossibility of immanentisation, which is to say, in the impossibility of the One. We can easily recognise here the irreducibility of Being to entity, and Nancy in fact explains his argument adopting Heidegger’s distinction between ontological and ontical (*Sein* and *Seiende*, see sec.1.1). Thus the irreducible ontological relation proves to be the relation of the entity to its own Being: “a relation [of the Absolute] *to* its own being instead of making this being immanent to the absolute totality of beings” (Nancy 1991, 6). “And so, being

²⁵ On the notion of singularity, see also page 62 et seq. in this thesis.

‘itself’ comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and, if you will—in any case this is what I am trying to argue—as *community*” (Nancy 1991, 6; emphasis added). Therefore, what Nancy calls community is this relational character of Being, Being-ecstatic of Being itself. In fact, the preoccupation of the whole book is revealed here. Let us follow, however, the actual picture of community that Nancy offers to readers.

The key word for this picture is *partage* translated in *The Inoperative Community* as sharing. Nancy defines it in spatial terms as distribution, partition, or dis-location. The community of sharing is that of singularities touching one another, but with these singularities constituted by sharing itself. Nancy sees his task in

thinking the *sharing* [*partage*] of community and the sovereignty in the sharing or *shared sovereignty*, shared *between Daseins*, between singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation—the sharing itself—is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication as this is understood to exist between subjects. But these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*, by the sharing that makes them *others*: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing:

“communicating” by not “communing.” These “places of communication” are no longer places of fusion, even though in them one *passes* from one to the other; they are defined and exposed by their dislocation. Thus, the communication of sharing would be this very dislocation (Nancy 1991, 25).

What is presented here is the picture of a divided space inhabited by touching one another’s singularities. Besides, the passage contains what could be considered as the

definition of sharing: “communicating” by not “communing.” Community thereby stands opposed to communion, which is a society of immanence and “fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*” (Nancy 1991, 15). The very definition of community and sharing refers to the impossibility of—or rather the resistance to—communion or fusion. What makes the resistance possible is the non-static character of distribution. Sharing is essentially the movement of coming into Being and fusion does not take place thanks to singularities’ co-appearing or, as Nancy terms it, compearing. This means for him that any singularity co-appears with other singularities and can appear only together with them. Whenever the singularity appears, others appear as well. Singularity exists only by and through exposing to outside (Nancy 1991, 29). Nancy says that singularities therefore share identities. This means, in its turn, that the actual event is the appearance not so much of singularities but rather of their very difference. Compearance

consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)—a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: “you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I” (“*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*”). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* (“*toi partage moi*”) (Nancy 1991, 29).

How are we to understand the appearance of the between or exposition? In tune with Nancy’s previous discussion (the community of singularities touching each other), we should probably think of the distribution or dislocation of singularities, of the event of differing and drawing borders (although without any pre-existing space supposed to be divided). As we shall see, this understanding of compearance is not incorrect. However, it is not complete either. Nancy develops another vision of the “between you and I” essentially based on his reading of writing. This vision will become our theme later. At this point I would like to focus on the distributive model of community. Its further specification

is the interruption of myth.

Community interrupted or lost

Another name for the impossibility of communion (opposed to the sharing of community) is the interruption of community²⁶. Its exemplary figure is the interruption of myth. Nancy grasps myth as a founding narrative. Its principal function lies in founding a community. Myth does so through organising the community around itself: “myth necessarily contains a pact, namely, the pact of its own recognition: in a single gesture, in a single sentence, in sum, myth says what is and says that we agree to say that this is (it also says, therefore, what saying is)” (Nancy 1991, 50). Myth does not refer to any reality beyond itself, be it natural or social. It rather creates this reality, the reality of community: “myth says that it says, and says that this is what it says, and in this way organises and distributes the world of humanity with its speech” (Nancy 1991, 48). Saying here is akin to showing—myth shows the foundation, while at the same time inventing it. As origin, myth itself originates from nothing. For this reason it might be regarded as a fiction, but it is, as Nancy put it, “a founding fiction, or a foundation by fiction” (Nancy 1991, 53). Myth conceals no reality, it is itself a condition and foundation of any reality whatsoever. Nancy compares the so comprehended myth with Kant’s schematism—a condition of possibility for any human experience (Nancy 1991, 54). Myth is also language showing itself: “Fundamentally, *mythos* is the *act of language* par excellence, the performing of the paradigm” (Nancy 1991, 54). And, which is more important in our context, Nancy directly equates the founding functions of myth and Being and speaks of “a mythic essence of

²⁶ Although Nancy distinguishes between community and communion, with the term interruption being more applicable to the latter, he usually speaks of the interruption of community. Probably he means to emphasise that community is itself the movement of interruption.

Being” (Nancy 1991, 54). Thus, myth is “an absolutely foundational, symbolizing, or distributive speech” (Nancy 1991, 52).

Now, this myth is interrupted. This does not mean that it is absent. Although Nancy at times speaks of myth’s absence, he immediately corrects himself: it is the absence of a very special sort, better to be named interruption. What is absent is rather not the myth but its power to found a community, its pact and recognition. This is why the interruption of a myth is always accompanied by the interruption of a community. The loss of community, however, may be a resource for the community of another kind, “community of the absence of community,” so to say. The latter is opposed to fusion:

The absence of community appears with the recognition of the fact that no community, in the fusion that it is essentially seeking, for example in “the ancient festival,” can fail “to create a new individual, that one might call the collective individual” (Nancy 1991, 60). (Nancy quotes Bataille here)

This is another formulation of the impossibility of immanence or totality. Here, it is associated with the impossibility of the collective individual. Nevertheless, for Nancy myth is not merely communal, that is, belonging to communion. Its logic shows a community that does not disappear even after myth’s interruption. Nancy once again exploits the ontology of event. Despite its tendency to totalisation, myth is at bottom compearance because it gives Being-in-common²⁷. Compearance thus lurks within myth in spite of its

²⁷ “Being *in* common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (*comparaissent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This compearance (*comparution*) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it” (Nancy 1991, 58).

tendency to fusion. Moreover, it resists fusion. Nancy describes this function of myth in a manner of the ontology of event that brings forth everything that it contains.

The very idea of inventing a myth. . . is a contradiction in terms. Neither the community nor, consequently, the individual (the poet, the priest, or one of their listeners) invents the myth: to the contrary, it is they who are invented or who invent themselves in the myth (Nancy 1991, 58-9).

Hence, myth, like Being, is a distribution and dislocation. This is not to say that compearance is mythic. Myth remains totalitarian for Nancy. But he seems to argue that compearance takes a priority over myth and undermines its pretension to totality²⁸. Myth still founds a community but tends to make of it a collective individual, which it is not. Accordingly, Nancy conceives of the absence of myth not as the absence of the founding but as the movement of “unfounding” or unworking (Nancy 1991, 60). Borrowing the term from Bataille, he calls this movement passion and explains: “the passion of and for community propagates itself, unworked, appealing, demanding to pass beyond every limit and every fulfilment enclosed in the form of an individual” (Nancy 1991, 60). This is a genuine communication because “this interruption once again exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities” (Nancy 1991, 60). It is in this way that Nancy derives the multiplicity of singularities from interruption. Indeed, passing beyond an individual leads apparently to the confronting of other singularities, and hence the distributive character of myth, compearance, and Being acquires the meaning of building a differentiated social body. This step is principal for Nancy’s theory of community and one of my major tasks in this work is to demonstrate its doubtfulness. But before we examine it more carefully, we need to expand on Nancy’s distributive model of community.

²⁸ I would say that myth is parasitic on compearance.

Singularity

It would not be an exaggeration to say that ‘singularity’ and ‘singular’ are the most important words in Nancy’s vocabulary (at least in the two books considered). Not only is community composed of singularities or singular beings, but also all principal Nancy’s notions—compearance, Being, sense, event, etc.—carry the mark of singularity. It is their singular character that first of all stands opposed to totality, fusion, essence, myth, etc. Singularity designates the absence of any pre-given totality. The corresponding community is “formed by an articulation of ‘particularities,’ and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular beings into itself” (Nancy 1991, 75). Nancy recalls Marx as a thinker who was working out the concept of such a community, “a division of tasks that does not divide up a pre-existing generality” (Nancy 1991, 75). Nevertheless, singular beings do form a totality: “they relate, in some respect or in some way,... to a *totality* that marks their common end...” (Nancy 1991, 75). This sort of totality differs drastically from fusion. It is made up by the articulation of each member:

...articulation is only a juncture, or more exactly the play of the juncture: what takes place where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other—exactly at its limit... without this mutual play—which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them—ever forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole. Here, *the totality is itself the play* of the articulations (Nancy 1991, 76).

Nancy goes further and, unlike Marx, conceives of not only totality but also singular beings themselves as formed by the same articulation. This view is first presented in *The Inoperative Community* and then further developed in *The Sense of the World* where the chapter ‘Someone’ (68-75) is entirely devoted to the theme of singularity. It starts with

the following passage:

There are some things, there are *some ones*, there are numerous *ones*, *singularities*. Sense is the singularity of all the singular ones, in all senses simultaneously. It is singularity first of all in the distributive or disseminative sense of the nonsubstitutable unicity of each singular one (be it, for example, a rock or a man named Peter [*pierre ou Pierre*]. But sense is also the singularity of the singular ones in the transitive or transitional sense of what shares them out and what they all share among themselves (their finitude, common to all, proper to none, as a common impropriety, communicating yet neither communicated nor communion). And finally, sense is singularity in the collective or worldly sense of what makes of the totality of the existent the singular absolute of being (its infinite spacing). (Nancy 1997, 68)

As we can see, Nancy identifies “some one” with singularity. The latter is therefore the name for the member of community. Nevertheless, this passage does not directly deal with human community and does not even differentiate things (‘a rock’) and people (‘a man named Peter’). So far, therefore, singularity has nothing to do with community. What we do learn from the passage is that singularity covers three clusters of meaning: distribution, finitude, and “collectivity” of Being. They are closely connected and opposed to the metaphysical subjectivity or the presupposition of presence. The latter is something that precedes its own presentation, although appears only through it. “The *sub-* or *sub-*jecthood represents in a way the inverted form of the *prae-* of *pres-ence*: the present that precedes itself and thus also remains behind itself” (Nancy 1997, 69). But, according to the logic of event which Nancy applies here, such presence “resolves itself into an *absence* in the very instant of its—supposed—presentation” (Nancy 1997, 69). The foundation thus disappears and we can sink into nihilism but precisely at that point, according to Nancy,

we come to the singular existence of the founding itself, “the simple and absolute position that cuts short all supposition, all *sub-* or *pre-* . . . no longer privation of all predicates, but predicates without support, holding each other together mutually, singularly” (Nancy 1997, 69-70). Thus, we shift from the pre-existing presence that presents itself to the logic of presenting by itself.

The next six pages of Nancy’s text are devoted to a more detailed examination of singularity. He offers three traits of the singular (someone): it is “unique”, “whatever”, and “exposed” (Nancy 1997, 71-5).

Unique. “The unicity of the singular consists quite exactly in its multiplicity” states Nancy. How are we to understand this statement? Nancy’s explanation shows that its primary meaning points to the simultaneity of singularities and their relations. No one exists alone: “‘One’ means: some ones *and* some other ones, or some ones *with* other ones” (Nancy 1997, 71). The singular does not possess its own singularity: “singular unicity is what shares it out and what it shares with the totality of singular multiplicity” (Nancy 1997, 72). And furthermore: “it does not constitute its singularity on the basis of its own resources—on the contrary, it does so on the basis of the most common resource, the one that comes (down) to each and every one as to none” (Nancy 1997, 72). What is this common resource Nancy refers to? In fact, the unicity of every one is a consequence of the world’s unicity, or more exactly still, the event’s unicity. The singular “is being-as-act or being-in-action,” and the whole analysis of event (see chapter 1) becomes relevant here. Therefore, the unicity of the singular amounts to the unicity of the event or happening. On the other hand, the multiplicity of the singular is situated on the level of what happened, not happening. But it is the latter—as Nancy put it, the signature of existence—that assures the unicity of all singularities and appears thereby as the primary singularity. Given that singularity is conceived in the context of distribution, one might be tempted to attribute unicity to the ‘some ones’, that is, to the members of the community. But in fact unicity is

that of the temporal instance. It cannot structurally be applied to the distributed items. In other words, this unicity points to the temporal rather than spatial multiplicity. Let us note this ambiguity.

Whatever. Nancy stresses a simple fact: “every one is just as singular as every other one”, “always capable of coming *in the place* of the other”. This substitutability may be understood—and Nancy definitely means that—as a similarity in the structure of happening, that is, as a similarity insofar as the singularity is the event, happening, singular going-coming. This similarity is independent of the (possible) dissimilarity or even incommensurability of what happens: “Birth/death, each *as* the other, a singular going-coming, represents this intersection of substitution and nonsubstitution, of the replaceable and the irreplaceable, the whatever, and the unique” (Nancy 1997, 73). It is in this sense that “what is commensurable in them [singularities—OD] is their incommensurability” (Nancy 1997, 72). In this way, I believe, one should understand Nancy’s notion of example:

... every one, being born, dying, being-there, exemplifies singularity.

Each proposes itself as *an* example, if you like, but it exposes this example, every time, as exemplary, in the sense of a remarkable model.

That which is exemplary each time, that which sets an example, is singularity itself, insofar as it is never anything but *this* or *that* singularity, inimitable at the very heart of its being-whatever. (Nancy 1997, 73)

Examples are singular in their ontological structure, which essentially implies the uniqueness of the act of existence. Accordingly, that the similarity of examples does not refer to any generality or universality of some “ideal existence” simply means its belonging to the level different from where any “ideal existence” may occur. If it is “generality,” it is that of repetition, not of substance.

The very term 'substitutability' and the idea of example as a remarkable model indicate rather that the 'what' of happening is repeatable. I shall later rewrite Nancy's presentation of singularity in terms of saying and repeating but already at this point we can see the affinities of singularity with the act of saying, of the substitutability of "whatever" with the accessibility of the said (note Nancy's usage of deictic words—"this or that singularity"—in the quotations above), and of the uniqueness of the singular with that of the instance of saying. In terms of repetition, what is repeated and the structure of repeating are commensurable, whereas the event or the fact of repeating is incommensurable. The former belongs to the system of language (including its 'languageness'), whereas the latter marks the place of the subjectivity of involvement. Thus, the reduction of the event (in fact, saying) to the distributive structure of language amounts to the elimination of the speaker from the event.

Exposed. In a comment on the Russian translation of his paper "Répondre de l'existence" (Nancy 1998, 317) Nancy points out that the notion of exposition is especially important for him. It denotes ex-position as both positioning outside and Being-subjected-(to), risking. It points to the existence as openness towards others in the sense of making oneself accessible. This is the meaning Nancy keeps in mind while describing singularity (1997). However, it is embedded into the context of the ontology of event and thus bears no explicit reference to this idea. Later on, in the consideration of community, exposition acquires precisely the meaning of becoming accessible (this conceptual shift has yet to be dealt with). But here, the main meaning of exposition is the attestation of existence: "what is exposed is exposition itself. What is presented is coming-into-presence, and thus, the *différance* of its being-present" (Nancy 1997, 74). And further: "What is exposed in this way is thus a singular transitivity of being, and what every one engages in is an attestation of existence" (Nancy 1997, 74). And finally: "*Here attestation replaces foundation*. In its way, this formula contains all sense" (Nancy 1997, 74-5). This radical expression of the

primary status of the event is simultaneously the expression of the absence of the pre-given “without the least connotation or intonation of an appeal to a hidden sense or revelation” (Nancy 1997, 75). Therefore, this meaning of exposition falls entirely into the pattern of the ontology of event. Happening, the event attests the existence, which needs henceforth no other “foundation” whether it is substance, essence, or pre-given sense. Singularity is the absolute beginning. It is a response with no preceding question, “it is a given guarantee, a promise, an engagement” (Nancy 1997, 71). Is there anyone who gives the guarantee and makes the promise? No, it is rather the event by itself that guarantees and attests. According to the logic of event, nothing precedes it, and anyone capable of promising is to be born in the event itself.

“There is” and the opening of the world and sense

In *The Sense of the World*, as the title shows, the leading theme and problem is the sense of the world. Nancy starts with the absence of sense and comes to the equivalence of world and sense. Since sense is absent, the world no longer refers to it. None the less, there remains the fact of the world’s Being, which precedes any signification. As a consequence,

If we are *toward* the world, if there is being-toward-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense. The *there is* makes sense by itself and as such. We no longer have to do with the question, “why is there something in general?” but with the answer, “there is something, and that alone makes sense.” (Nancy 1997, 7)

“The sense of the world” becomes a tautological expression. The world does not *have* sense any longer, but *is* sense. The world comes to be the starting point, the first and the last reference of meanings. Its presence insists absolutely: “‘The world is the origin’ means that the origin is *there* where it opens itself” (Nancy 1997, 160). Or in a short formula: “*There is*: sense is there” (Nancy 1997, 160). At this point Nancy evokes the

notion of significance (*signifiante* which makes signification possible). He explains in a note the meaning of significance and cites Jean-Christophe Bailly: "The unlimited, but in all the limits that give access to it despite everything, and that coincide with the arrival of sense, with the fact that there is sense" (Nancy 1997, 173). Sense that comes before any signification and the event of sense/world/Being is in fact the origin of significance. We have arrived at the further specification of the distributive model. Sharing here becomes the origin of the signifying order, which is to say, of the order in which alone signification can appear as such. For this reason I shall also call the distributive model that of the origin of significance.

What precisely, however, is *there*? Is it a particular sense or the fact of its Being? What is attested in this way, a particular order of significance or the fact that there is whichever significance at all? In his explanations Nancy definitely conceives of sense as purely the fact of sense. In this way, what is opened in the opening of the world/sense is this opening itself. What seems to be important for Nancy's theory of community is the fact of attestation, no matter what is attested. This is only apparently strange, since, as we shall see soon, what Nancy wants to describe is not such or such a community but rather the very event of its establishing.

Sense and truth

Further elaboration of the distributive model can be found in Nancy's distinction between sense and truth. They are distinguished ontologically:

That one speaks of sense does not mean that one abandons or disdains the category of truth. But one does shift registers. Truth is being-*such* [*l'être-tel*], or more exactly it is the quality of the presentation of being *such* as such. Sense, for its part, is the movement of being-*toward* [*l'être-à*], or

being as *coming* into presence or again as transitivity, as passage to presence—and therewith as passage *of* presence. (Nancy 1997, 12)

If we recall Heidegger's definition of meaning as "something *as* something [*etwas als etwas*]"²⁹, we shall immediately notice the parallel between the sense-truth and Being-entity distinctions. This is the distinction between Being as *such* and Being as *Being* (Nancy 1997, 12). The former points to the essence (Nancy's example: the essence of the phenomenon is to appear, *φαίνεσθαι*), whereas the latter is the action of the verb 'to be.' This allows Nancy to speak of the transitive character of Being: Being *is* the entity, it is Being *toward* the entity, "the structure, property, and sense-event of the entity in general" (Nancy 1997, 13). Just as Being is the presentation of entity, so is sense that of truth: "the distinction I am drawing between truth and sense is the distinction between the presentation of a present or the scene of presence and its division within itself" (Nancy 1997, 175). Sense is a presentation, truth is what it presents. At the same time, this is not the only function of sense. Besides presenting, sense provides a connection of truths that Nancy calls enchaining.

Truth punctuates, sense enchains. . . . [Punctuation] is always without spatial or temporal dimension. Enchaining, on the contrary, opens up the dimensional, spaces out punctuations. There is thus an originary spatiality of sense that is spatiality or spaciousness before any distinction between space and time: and this archi-spatiality is the matricial or transcendental form of a *world*. In turn, truth is in principle instantaneous (. . . one could

²⁹ "Meaning is the 'upon-which' of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception" (Heidegger 1962, 193) (emph. by Heidegger).

say that it is the a priori form of a universe, in the literal sense of the gathering-into-one). (Nancy 1997, 14-5)

The instantaneousness of truth does not prevent it from being divided within itself. Although what we have read until now may leave an impression that truth is a temporal instant whereas sense should be associated with temporal interval, this is not exactly so. For example, when explaining the analogy between sense-truth and syntactic-semantic distinctions (Nancy 1997, 15), Nancy conceives of punctuations as rather instantaneously co-existing. In fact, he does not distinguish between 'inter-' and 'intra-instantaneous' division. This is why the spatiality of sense precedes any distinction between space and time. Here he follows Derrida, and we shall see that he repeats the structure of *différance* in which every element is endowed with a meaning only thanks to temporal references to other elements (the temporal—retention-protection—division of presence in itself). But, as we have seen, this feature of *différance* is problematic, since Derrida does not differentiate two times of diachrony and in fact reduces the external time to the internal one (to be more precise, he does differentiate them but only in order to equate them immediately). Consequently, we find the same problem in Nancy's ontology. This will show itself in the concept of community that Nancy derives from the outlined theory of sense.

Citizen and subject. Establishing communal ties

However important the ontological understanding of sense set forth in the previous section is, its principal model for Nancy is political. It is above all political intuitions that Nancy seeks to explicate in terms of Being, compearance, and so forth. This is why the image of sense given in the chapter *Politics II* (Nancy 1997, 103-17) rules, in fact, the whole book.

Politics there is distinguished from love or hate in that it does not presuppose any ties already tied or given (Nancy 1997, 103). This absence of ties is the cardinal feature of

the community Nancy speaks of. Furthermore, he separates the politics of citizenship and subjecthood. "The citizen is, first of all, *one, someone, everyone*, while the subject is, first of all, *self*, that is, the circling back through which a *one* raises its unicity to the power of unity" (Nancy 1997, 104). Citizenship points to a common field of alienated identities, and is nothing else than their sharing:

...the citizen is a mobile complex of rights, obligations, dignities, and virtues. These do not relate to the realisation of any foundation or end other than the mere institution of the city. In a sense, the citizen does nothing other than share with his/her fellow citizens the functions and signs of citizenship, and in this 'sharing' his/her being is entirely expressed. (Nancy 1997, 104)

The in-common of the city has no identity other than the space in which the citizens cross each other's paths, and it has no unity other than the exteriority of their relations. In a certain sense, citizenship in accordance with its pure concept is always virtually citizenship of the 'world.'

(Nancy 1997, 104)

Therefore, unicity or oneness is the principal characteristic of the citizen. However, Nancy's description is uncertain. If the citizen is "a mobile complex of rights, etc," what can we say about the unicity of items (rights, etc) themselves? Do they possess any oneness different from that of the citizen? Later on in the chapter Nancy seems to answer this question negatively, and any unicity appears to emerge in the same event/move of tying. Here, by contrast, Nancy differentiates them, and this reveals a problem. Namely, Nancy's general intention is to deny any sort of pre-given presence. A citizen, if any, is no more than an effect of the institution of the city, mobile complex of items (rights, etc)

constituted by the institution. But it remains unclear whether one can say the same about the items themselves.

Unlike the politics of citizenship, that of subjecthood implies “the demand for a subjective appropriation of sense” (Nancy 1997, 105). The model of this appropriation is the Hegelian subjectivity which “retains within itself its own negativity” (Nancy 1997, 106). Accordingly, the political subject appropriates the constitutive exteriority of the city (Nancy 1997, 106). The subject, therefore, has no interiority different from the appropriated exteriority. This means, among other things, that the subject presupposes the division of the city as something which the subject is to appropriate. In fact, there is a full reciprocity between citizen and subject. Both “mirror” each other.

The citizen becomes subject at the point where the *community* gives itself (as) an interiority, and at the point where *sovereignty* no longer contents itself with residing in the formal autoteleology of a “contract,” or in its autojurisdiction, but expresses also an essence. . . Reciprocally, the subject makes itself into a citizen at the point where the expressed essence tends to express itself in and as a civic space and, if one can put it like this, to “display” subjective essentiality. (Nancy 1997, 106)

Therefore, as the passage demonstrates, conceptually citizen and subject share the same element. This is the form of the city, which Nancy understands as a network of connected items. The difference between citizenship and subjecthood lies then in the first being, in fact, the contingent institution (appearing) of the network, whereas the second is its interiorisation. More exactly, subjecthood begins with presupposing (instituting, opening up) the sphere of interiority into which the exteriority of the city can be projected. This common element leads, according to Nancy, to the intrinsic defect in both politics — that of citizenship and subjecthood. They take sense as something given or self-sufficient. Social ties in the case of citizenship or the items that they tie in the case of subjecthood are

considered as self-sufficient (Nancy 1997, 111), whereas the problem is precisely these ties themselves. Nancy formulates the task of inventing a politics with “no longer any subject, but no citizen either” (Nancy 1997, 109). He finds this politics in the very activity of establishing ties:

It is therefore a matter of going toward a thought (that means indiscernibly toward a *praxis*) of the (k)not as such. It is the *tying* of the (k)not that must come to the crucial point, the place of democracy’s empty truth and subjectivity’s excessive sense. (Nancy 1997, 111)

The tied here is understood in two senses of (k)nots and their connection. Tying thus establishes both (k)nots and the network of their connections. It is a gesture, “the very gesture of tying and enchainment of each to each, tying each time unicities (individuals, groups, nations, or peoples) that have no unity other than the unity of the (k)not, unity enchainment to the other, the enchainment always world-wide and the world having no unity other than that of its enchainment” (Nancy 1997, 112).

Thus, we can recognise in tying a further development of the concept of compearance from *The Inoperative Community*. Community is again understood within the distributive model of co-appearing singularities. Here, however, it acquires an additional aspect—it is interpreted as a search for sense. From the very outset of *The Sense of the World* Nancy acknowledges the essential absence of sense. The task of the book is stated as follows: “I will suggest that the only chance for sense and its only possible sense reside either this side of or beyond the appropriation of signifieds and the presentation of signifiers, in the very opening of the abandonment of sense, as the opening of the world” (Nancy 1997, 3). The absence of sense is considered as its crucial trait. At the same time, the politics of tying can be summarised in the phrase: neither myth, nor nihilism. This formula stands opposed to two regimes of sense: its absoluteness (myth) or arbitrariness and dissolution (nihilism). Both, Nancy claims, are caught up in the regime of signifying

sense, regime presupposing either presence or absence of sense. Here, sense is “the signifier of a proper and present signified, the signifier of the proper and the present as such” (Nancy 1997, 3). It matters little whether this signified is posed as stable and perennial (myth) or as absent and illusory (nihilism). Rejecting both possibilities, Nancy nonetheless renders sense as in some way present, namely present precisely as something to be established. The search for sense is not a disadvantage or misfortune—“not deprivation but a condition of existence” (Nancy 1997, 15): “Nothing is lacking in our being: the lack of given sense is, rather, precisely what completes our being” (Nancy 1997, 152). Community exists precisely as not given. To make a community—inoperative community—means to move towards the community, with this movement itself being precisely what makes the community. This specific temporal structure constitutes the “coming-and-going” character of community. This marks the task of re-establishing community, re-establishing its ties—the coming community is a task. Nancy compares community/coming with breaking a path (*frayage*) or creating a melody in a jazz improvisation. In any case it is the establishing of ties that in no sense pre-exist. “Everything remains to be invented” (Nancy 1997, 121) is a formula to have fundamental significance for the understanding of sense. It is the very meaning of coming. It points not to obligation but to assignment, setting a problem. Ethics exists not as rules to comply with, or obligations/commands to execute, but as an ethical problem to be solved: “the absolute injunction of having to establish ties” (Nancy 1997, 121). Its absoluteness consists in the impossibility of avoiding it.

Nancy associates this towardness of sense with the transitivity of Being. The latter designates something which has not yet finished: “that which is not *in* its end (deferring itself in its end, deferring its *end* in itself), is *toward* itself” (Nancy 1997, 28). Nancy grasps this “not being in the end” as breaking path (*frayage*), in which every new instant is the opening of a new space. The act of Being is not produced: “It ‘is produced’ in the

remarkable sense of ‘taking place,’ ‘happening’” (Nancy 1997, 28). The absence of sense, therefore, indicates rather the birth of a new sense and impossibility of holding for oneself what was born (this is what Nancy calls the withdrawal of Being in the very event of Being). But here a question can be raised. The happening of Being seems to be anonymous. It merely happens, whereas the search for sense should probably imply some one who searches. It has not yet become clear how Nancy copes with this anonymity of Being when he enters the field of community. In fact, it is in this passage that Nancy’s exposition becomes perhaps most ambiguous. Thus, we are coming to the discussion of this ambiguity. But before we proceed, let me outline the main characteristics of the distributive model that was the theme of the current section.

The distributive model of community

- The simplest scheme is that of attestation. According to it, there is a movement that sets up or attests an existence. The latter needs no further elaboration, as the scheme stresses its independence from any pre-given essence.
- A more concrete scheme is that of punctuation and enchainment according to which point-like items with neither temporal nor spatial dimensions are enchainment due to a movement of towardness directed from one item to another. This is a general scheme of the community’s resistance to totality: the accent shifts from the unity to its establishing. The latter is opposed to the veiling/unveiling of *aletheia* or appearing of phenomena, insofar as they still reside “on the level of punctuation, not on the level of enchainment” (Nancy 1997, 175). They still privilege truth whereas “the *world* invites us to think no longer on the level of the phenomenon, however it might be understood (as surging forth, appearing, becoming visible, brilliance, occurrence, event), but on the level. . . of the dis-position (spacing, touching, contact, crossing)” (Nancy 1997, 176).
- In the section about suffering and unhappiness Nancy brings forth three formal structures of sense.

There are perhaps only three formal structures of sense: (1) the *observance* of an order or ritual of the world, where all unhappiness is a tragic omission opening onto truth (Oedipus); (2) *salvation*, where unhappiness is an illness, a worldly alienation that calls forth the tragedy of its infinite healing/expiation (Parsifal); (3) existence, as the exposition of being-*toward*-the-world or being-world—where evil seems coextensive with good, the “worst” with the “best,” and where therefore the exposition has to be decided each time. In other words, sense as given, sense as mediated, sense as surprise. Or again, in another register, sense as set of signs, sense as signification, sense as origin of significance.

(Nancy 1997, 147)

This links the distributive model with the concept of signification. As a result, dislocating becomes the birth of the signifying order (which is divided in itself). This can be understood as compearance but as that of meanings rather than members of community.

3.2 The ambiguity of the distributive model

Multiplicity and temporality

Speaking of community is of course a speaking of the multiplicity of people. Indeed, individuals, groups, unions, and other diverse relationships are always implied in all of Nancy’s discussions. What he argues against is the model of closed up individuals (including collective ones) bound into a pre-established community. Thus multiplicity precedes unity. However, not being fully satisfied with this claim, Nancy tries to derive multiplicity from the structure of Being. Arguments here are various. The simplest one recalls Hegel’s reasoning for the impossibility of pure autonomy (see p. 56). However, this seems rather misleading. Indeed, Hegel’s issue is the irreducibility of entities’ relation to

Being or of the difference between Being and entities. He speaks of the duality of existence, so to say, not its multiplicity. In this argument, we rather deal with the alterity of Being (moreover, it is not clear how this anonymous alterity may be converted into the personal Other). However, Nancy suggests two other lines of argument. One is based on temporality, the other on the concept of voice. Let me start with temporality.

“There is not merely one thing in the world, and only thus can there be something (or rather some things)” (Nancy 1997, 67). In the section entitled *Spanne* Nancy draws this conclusion from the temporal separation. It is time that is “intrinsically spanned or stretched” (Nancy 1997, 64). In order for the passage of time to take place, the present, the now must be extended. This extended taking place of the present is more original than a succession of punctual presents: “There can be no *passage* from one present *to* another, if neither the one nor the other takes place” (Nancy 1997, 64). Nancy starts with arguing against time understood after the model of variations of the ever-present substance. By contrast, Nancy’s theme is not a modification but, if one can say so, the birth and death of substance: “It is the spacing of the present that *takes place*, as present, when a ‘substance’ or a ‘subject’ is coming along or going away” (Nancy 1997, 64-5). Thus the present features the complex temporality of coming-and-going. Furthermore, the main sense of coming-and-going is the interruption of temporal continuities. Sense as presentation without presentness [*présentité*] “comes and goes, as an interruption of symbolic enchainment and of substantial continuities. Or more precisely, it comes and goes, as an interruption of symbolic enchainments qua concatenations that ensure, by means of signification, a communication of substances (substances that are thereby signified, supposed, and subjectified)” (Nancy 1997, 134). This all means indeed that temporality is inherent in the present, but in what sense can we say that the present precedes *itself*? It rather springs up as always-having-already-been. But again, in what sense? Heidegger and Husserl are more precise on this point when they say—each in his own manner—that the

presence is directed or intended towards the past and future (with the past, future, and present each having different structures). As we have seen in the introductory chapter, these intentions belong to the internal time of event, whereas coming-and-going (the gesture of presenting, as Nancy put it (Nancy 1997, 66)) belong to the external time. The latter is structured “in accordance with a *not*”³⁰, which means that temporal span implies present and non-present. It is a passage but not “the effective step from one existence to another.” Consequently, the multiplicity of presents found in the internal time does not take place in the external one. Thus, Nancy’s inference of the multiplicity of presents from the external time of coming-and-going seems doubtful. But even less can we draw the multiplicity of things from temporal separation. Nonetheless, this is precisely what Nancy does:

Separation as tension—time stretched like a bow of which it would also be itself the arrow. But for that, precisely, in order that there should be separation of the stretching or being-stretched out, no punctuality, no instantaneous instant, but the instant as spacing out, and spacing out as the *simul* of the several things that make up a world. (Nancy 1997, 66-7)

Obviously, spacing here has a temporal meaning. It is the creation of time itself, the time of event. The following is one more passage that shows that plurality for Nancy definitely carries in itself a temporal meaning: it is, in fact, the plurality of instants.

There is not merely one thing in the world, and only thus can there be something (or rather some things). If there were only one, there would be only pure time, immobile duration [*durée*]. But there is more than one

³⁰ “Nothing . . . is except in accordance with a *not*: the crossing from nonbeing to being, that is, from being itself insofar as it is nothing to being itself again insofar as it is (entrances) the existent—and the crossing from being to nonbeing.” (Nancy 1997, 65)

thing, and this means not so much that there are several times one but, rather, more than one—the plural of a singular that is itself always and from the very first plural (*singuli*, for “singulus” does not exist)—*more than one* is the more than oneness in the very present of the one, its excess that separates it from itself within itself. (Nancy 1997, 67)

The passages clearly bring out that the multiplicity of things is, in fact, that of instances. Hence, the temporal (interruption) turns into the spatial (dislocation, dividing). This happens in two steps. The first is the identification of the two times of diachrony. The second is the interpretation of the temporal division of the internal time in terms of dislocation and spacing as such (this logic is a Husserlian heritage present also in Derrida’s *différance*: the division of entities is temporal in the first order, since the entity exists only thanks to its reference to other entities in the past and future). The next step that Nancy makes after his identification of the temporal and spatial is the interpretation of multiplicity as social. The goal of these transformations is to suggest a new type of social relation instead of substantial unity (myth) and contingent union (nihilism). However, we can see that his attempt to found this relation on ontology is rather doubtful. Does this mean that the whole theory of community also becomes so? No. As a matter of fact, Nancy proposes another vision of these relations and thus another logic of the inoperative community. It is rather implicit, unlike the distributive model. He relies on the event that is in many respects similar to the event of Being. This is the event of speaking toward the other. It brings about separation rather than distribution.

Separation versus distribution

Compearance

consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)—a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but

exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: “you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I” (“*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*”). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* (“*toi partage moi*”) (Nancy 1991, 29).

I have already quoted these lines while discussing the distributive model (see p. 58). They were supposed to demonstrate that not so much items as their differences compear in compearance. Now let us note that the passage also suggests that compearance is not merely a co-appearing of items or differences. It has to do with “you and I,” that is, with very specific singularities, one of which (*I*) is perhaps the most specific of all. For Nancy the difference between “you and I” and between any other singularities are of the same order. This permits him to apply the logic we have examined in the previous section: Nancy starts with the ontological distinction (*Sein-Seiende*) which he interprets as the impossibility of immanence. Then he infers from it the unavoidable co-presence of the other (*you* co-appearing with *I*); after that he assumes others’ presence and applies to them the same structure of the impossible immanence; at last, this all culminates in the picture of singularities compearing in the event of dislocating. However, this is not the only logic of community in Nancy. He also provides another vision of the same situation, in which he accentuates relations between the two rather than multiplicity.

On the one hand, it is a dialogue (“Here, *the totality is itself the play* of the articulation. . . . This totality is the totality of a dialogue” (Nancy 1991, 76)). This dialogue has a specific meaning:

I no longer (no longer essentially) hear in it [dialogue—OD] what the other *wants to say* (to me), but I hear in it that the other, or some other (*de l’autre*) speaks and that there is an essential articulation of the voice and of voices, which constitute the being *in common* itself (Nancy 1991, 76).

This is more than a simple compearance of entities. It accentuates the other’s

saying in its distinction from the said. On the other hand, community is based on the death of others. Nancy quotes Blanchot:

The basis of communication is not necessarily speech, nor even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, and no longer my death, but someone else's, whose living and closest presence is already an eternal and unbearable absence (Nancy 1991, 61).

Paradoxically, a proper communication is that with the absent other. Communication with the other starts with separation. "To be in common" proves to mean "to be separated." This points to the face-to-face relationships with each particular other rather than to the compearance of multiple singularities. This also gives sense to the words I have already quoted: "...the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) . . ."

At the same time, communication in Nancy is linked with *my* death (and birth):

. . . each birth exposes another singularity, a supplementary limit, and therefore another communication. This is not the opposite of death, for the death of this singular being who has just been born is also inscribed and communicated by its limit. It is already exposed to its death, and it exposes us to it as well. Which means, essentially, that this death as well as this birth are removed from us, are neither our work nor the work of the collectivity (Nancy 1991, 60).

The inaccessibility of death for our work marks the impossibility of immanence, which is similar to what we have seen in the ontology of event. Although, here we also deal with the relation between the two, these two are rather the singularity and its otherness or alterity. Nancy identifies this otherness with that of the other in dialogue. What is the logic of this identification? Do they rather have different incommensurable structures? In order to answer these questions I shall put into play the concept of saying.

Saying and Nancy's ontology

The next two sections are devoted to a systematic interpretation of Nancy's ontology and concept of tying in terms of the saying/said distinction. Let us start with the observation that the structure of event is parallel to that of language-in-act. This is to say that one can discern saying, said, and signs within it. The transitivity of Being appears as language's feature to produce the said in the act of saying. Being-entities distinction becomes that of saying-said. Repetition peculiar to saying becomes that of example. Nancy's distinction between signs, signification, and the origin of significance (see Nancy 1997, 147 and page 76 of the present text) can be interpreted in terms of gestures. In the case of signs (myth) gestures are self-consistent rituals and the repetition is nothing but obedience. In the case of signification they start meaning something thanks to their reference to the invisible beyond the gestures. Although the logic of this reference is arguable, in any case it implies a system of significance (which is perhaps by definition the system of references as such). Significance gives birth to the distributive multiplicity of meanings. The same gestures are able henceforth to possess different meanings when they are inscribed into different orders of significance.

What is important is that in any case repetition is an appropriation, and the system of language logically precedes the fact of its usage. Language is pre-given, pre-established. To deny this pre-givenness is to turn to what Nancy calls the origin of significance. This denial destroys the temporal unity of the signifying order (therefore, two steps from signs to signification and then to the origin of significance may be treated as the denial of the distributive and temporal unity respectively). Nancy speaks of the fact of significance and grasps language as its ceaseless originating of significance. The repetitious character of saying is opposed here to the perpetual character of substance. In order for that to be, saying must exclude anything pre-given. This means that Nancy deals with a specific aspect of language—its making meanings possible or its establishing the order of

significance. This is a proper meaning of the absence of the pre-given. The latter stands opposed not to the structure or logic as such but rather to the unchangeable structure of the said—in a sense the logic of saying (i.e. language) is pre-given but its pre-giveness is not like that of essence. Nancy's ontology has to do with the specific structure of the fact of Being (namely, the structure of the origin of significance) rather than with merely this fact itself.

The absence of any pre-given unity of sense or Being may be safely called the guiding idea of Nancy's ontology. It is developed against different kinds of totalities. The first of them is temporal. In opposition to the constancy of substance, Nancy relies on the consistency of repetition. Thus he speaks of Being-as-act or Being-in-act. It essentially holds in itself the withdrawal, which is in fact a synonym for the absence of the pre-given. However, along with the negativity of the absence, the act or event points to the positivity of attestation. The gesture of presenting and the fact of Being are undeniable. Sense is there regardless of any foundation it might have or not. The task of philosophy is for Nancy to think the world and sense as such without referring to any pre-established structure whatsoever³¹. Sense therefore begins with each singularity (and singularity is therefore that of sense). This repetition (rhythm) is the temporal structure of event. We do not have to understand the absence of sense and the “nothing” of “All” as the absence of any structure at all. Nancy himself points out that this would be incorrect. Rhythm is this basic structure without being substantiality (Nancy 1997, 141-2). Repetitious saying possesses this rhythmic structure with its withdrawal at any instant of performing.

The second sort of totality is the “instantaneous” unity of existence. The interpretation from the standpoint of saying allows us to understand resistance to it as the internal multiplicity of saying. This can be done in several ways. First, significance as a

³¹ In this particular way, Nancy is a phenomenologist.

differential system of gestures implies their multiplicity. A gesture never appears but always co-appears. Second, saying allows the multiplicity of orders of significance. Nancy's early text (1990) shows how important the hermeneutical notion of horizon is for him. In this text he considers the sharing of voices as the ability for the said to be inscribed into different horizons and thereby to acquire different meanings³². This makes any said inevitably multiple. Third, saying is multiple in the sense of compearing voices, which does not amount to the co-presence of horizons. Of these three types of multiplicity the first two can be understood on the basis of the notion of significance. They reflect different kinds of its internal multiplicity. By contrast, the third one demands others who are not merely other orders of significance. We encounter here the third type of totality different from the temporal or instantaneous totality of meanings. Nancy evokes it when he discusses the passage beyond the individual. This totality, thus, is that of the individual and to exceed it means to touch other individuals (who thereby cease to be individuals and turn into singularities). In the distributive model community is derived from the fragmentation of the world in general. However, does Nancy's criticism of

³² In this text Nancy espouses the Gadamerian view of the two preconditions of understanding: 1) anticipating or announcing a meaning having to be interpreted and 2) regulating this anticipation on account of prejudices. Having applied it to the experience of the other, Nancy concludes: "the other can neither be signified, nor presented, but only announced. The announcement is, in this way, the mode of the proper presence of the other" (Nancy 1990, 247). On the one hand, this safeguards the other against placing him/her in one row with presence or signified. But on the other hand, this still grasps the other in the framework of meaning, this time not present but announced. To be more precise, this text reveals Nancy's ambiguity on this point. In his description he persistently moves amongst the announced meaning, the act of announcing, and the one who announces, tending nevertheless to remain within the context of meaning and meaningfulness. In contrast, the description of the other demands rather to account for the addressing which does not necessarily imply any transmitted, coming, or announced meaning.

totality truly lead to community? To answer the question let us turn to the concept of compearance.

Compearance also has more than one meaning in Nancy. However, they all have a common core based on the primary function of compearance: to overcome totality. Event, Being, sense are not total because at bottom they are a compearance (or sharing). However, it is not easy to understand what precisely this means because Nancy persistently moves from the level of saying to the level of the said and vice versa. As a result he tends to understand separation (which has to do with others' sayings) in terms of the said, that is, of the distribution of meanings or horizons. Indeed, we find three aspects of compearance in accordance with three kinds of the overcoming of totalities. Compearance refers to the instantaneousness of the event, ungroundedness of the appeared, or withdrawal. This all refers in turn to death, but *my* death, not others', death as a movement toward a completely unpredictable future (so unpredictable that even its happening is problematic). It has therefore to do with otherness rather than with the other, let alone multiple others³³. Compearance then is interpreted as the co-appearing of things or voices. Since voices here are understood after the model of horizons, this aspect of compearance can be traced, as we have seen, to the multiplicity inherent in significance and saying. Finally, compearance is thought of as "the appearance of the between as such," that is, as separation rather than distribution. In spite of Nancy's attempts to identify the three, I would like to insist on their difference. It becomes clear in terms of saying, since the three aspects of compearance correspond to the repetitious character of saying, the internal multiplicity of significance, and the experience of the other in addressing and self-exposing. However, in Nancy's text

³³ Levinas considers death—in opposition to Heidegger—as a primary relation to the other. However, he does not provide strong evidence for this. His argumentation is rather analogical (as to large extent is all his thinking). Moreover, in late writings he tends to speak of the other's death (for example, Levinas 1996).

these meanings are so closely interwoven that their difference is sometimes very difficult to discern. For example, on few pages (Nancy 1991, 72-6) one can find all three meanings of compearance that I have just discussed: temporality (offering as an act of incompleteness), multiplicity (the instant totality of touching/touched singularities), and the other's saying (it is here that Nancy writes the phrase I have already quoted: "I no longer... hear in [dialogue] what the other *wants to say* (to me) but... that the other... speaks..." (Nancy 1991, 76))³⁴. The last one is certainly the most important for Nancy. Community as a dialogue or sharing of voices is an ultimate theme of his elaboration. But he tries to think of the voice of the other as the (silent) Voice of Being. After all, the first two meanings of compearance stem from the Voice of Being and represent its two aspects: the fact of Being and Being as the event of laying foundation. But the other's voice is reducible to none of them. We see the indefiniteness of Nancy's position. His basic intuition is undoubtedly the society of subjects completely independent in their production of sense. Language, since it does not limit this independence, is perhaps the only possible connection of such subjects. Hence, Nancy takes language as a basic model of their relations. However, trying to grasp this plurality he departs from the ontology of event. Since the multiplicity of speakers cannot be understood in such a way, he, while in all other respects keeping to the level of saying, slips into the said when speaking of multiplicity (the notions of substitutability and example may serve as good instances of

³⁴ One can even observe how the first converts into the second. For example: "There is no singular *being*: there is, and this is different, an essential singularity *of being* itself.... In a sense, every being is absolutely singular: a stone never occupies the space of another stone" (Nancy 1991, 77). Here, the temporal or instantaneous (singularity of Being) turns into the spatial (the multiplicity of the occupied spaces). This identification could be traced perhaps to the temporal interpretation of Dasein's spatiality (that is, Being-the-there) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

this). The reason is that Nancy refuses to accept any theory of the subject that is different from the distributive one. The concept of subjectivity is substituted with that of singularity.

Singularity can also be interpreted in terms of saying. To begin with, one can easily notice the distinction between saying and the said in this concept. Three characteristic traits of singularity appear then as follows. The “unicity” of the singular is that of the act of saying, with saying here implying the said and the order of significance making it possible (whether it be structured as the supposing-supported or horizon-figure or differences-sign). The “whatever” then refers to the similarity of acts of saying: all such acts consist in using a language system, including possibly generating the whole system itself. The interpretation of the third trait, “exposition”, presents certain difficulties, again because of its ambiguity. The main meaning of exposition in *The Inoperative Community* is the attestation of Being. Now it converts into the attestation of the fact of language (let me remind you that by language act I mean any meaningful act, i.e. the act performed in view of meaning). The attestation is anonymous. However, as I have already pointed out, exposition for Nancy has another meaning (not in *The Inoperative Community*, though). It is understood as exposing toward others and thus requires that we take into account subjectivities of involvement and engagement. Saying in this case is not reducible to the event of sense. It is of another kind, that of responsibility. The difference lies in what I would call a rejective choice, sometimes or perhaps always negative. The event and the world are chosen even though there were no options at all. The power of rejection—even though it does not lead to any positive possibility—is a feature of subjectivity. This means that we cannot avoid subjectivity in our elaboration. In this sense the attestation Nancy speaks of is that of choice—someone has chosen to have the world and to have precisely this particular world. In this sense this is the attestation of someone, namely of someone who is saying. Saying therefore retains in its structure not only what is said and the fact of

saying but also who says. This “who” is precisely the place of the world, the *Da* of *Dasein*. However, it is also something more, insofar as it implies the agreement to be such a place, that is to say, taking responsibility for what happens at this place. We have to distinguish it from the responsibility of promise, although they may seem identical. Promise implies durability and is in this sense always the promise to keep on with what has started. By contrast, the responsibility of Being in a way precedes it and is the responsibility of beginning. It is the responsibility of bringing the world into reality, making the world exist (and keeping on with bringing).

Nancy’s representation of singularity as articulation (Nancy 1991, 76; see the discussion on p. 62 in this thesis) provides additional arguments for such reading. This text may serve as an example of Nancy’s ambiguity in the understanding of singularity. On the one hand, the picture there reminds one to a large extent of the coexistence of horizons, which do form a totality (of the event) but entail no fusion. On the other hand, we shall see the full analogy between articulation and saying, if we conceive of saying as in a certain sense multiple, as if the result of saying (that is, the said) is produced by the simultaneous saying of many singularities. Nancy does not distinguish the co-appearance of horizons and voices. Moreover, he seems to conceive of the coexistence of sayings after the model of horizons (despite the fact that he names them voices). For example, juncture in this passage (Nancy 1991, 76) is understood *simultaneously* as separation and as distribution. But if separation is the difference between what the other says and the other him/herself and if what the other says belongs in the final analysis to *my* structure, that is, to the structure of the event that happens to *me* (since it is *me*, who interprets what is said), the separation is the difference between *me* and the other (*you*). In fact, this is the difference between the event of Being and something else that is neither an entity nor Being, between what “happens to *me*” and what in some way “does not happen to *me*” or “happens not to *me*.” It is not by chance that the other’s death is so fundamental for Nancy’s meditation;

perhaps, the difference I am trying to describe is that between *my* death and the other's. And here lies the source of—in fact, ethical—dissymmetry between *me* and the other: to accept *my* death is not the same as to accept the other's. It is not clear how this difference can be described in terms of distribution belonging entirely to the sphere of mineness. Separation does not imply others' separation from one another. In this sense *I* touch others and they touch *me*, but only through a sort of unlawful approximation can we say that they touch one another. It is when Nancy tries to think the mutual touch of singularities that he moves to the level of the said. He undertakes, therefore, this unlawful approximation. He has to do so because otherwise the mutual touch is unthinkable. But situating the other within the sphere of the said puts it at risk of being objectified. It tends to make of the other a thing, or role, or personage—in any case something determined by the constitution of event. This positions the other within the sphere of mineness. In this sense it is *I* who is/am multiple. The multiplicity by itself, even non-totalisable, does not yet constitute a community³⁵.

Therefore, the examination of Nancy's concepts of totality, compearance, and singularity reveals three structurally different strategies of the escape from immanence. In terms of saying they are based on the temporal discontinuing of saying, internal multiplicity of significance, and saying toward the other. The first two of these fit naturally into the distributive model whereas the last one seems to surpass its limits. Let us inspect more closely how Nancy transfers ontology into the sphere of community.

³⁵ The same goes for difference. A diversified society composed of irreducible to one another entities is not yet a community. For this to happen, differences must be "recognised," or "accepted." In other words, not differences as such but how we deal with them, how we respond to the plurality, constitutes a community. Or again, not compearance by itself but a special mode of it is essential for community.

Saying and establishing communal ties

Let us consider now Nancy's theory of citizenship, subjecthood, and establishing communal ties (Nancy 1997, 103-17 and p.70 in this thesis) from the viewpoint of the saying/said distinction. Nancy changes the language of his description as he elaborates this theory. Instead of division and spacing he speaks of (k)nots and enchainment. This transforms the networks of items which is the common element of citizenship and subjecthood. To begin with, tying (k)nots introduces temporality into the analysis. Indeed, although the institution of the city and its further appropriation seem to be temporal, this time has nothing to do with the time of event. From the standpoint of diachrony, institution and appropriation both belong to the inner time of distribution. Moreover, the self-sufficiency of citizenship and subjecthood denotes precisely this fact, although each in its own way. Citizenship means the self-sufficiency of any instant, its independence from all other instants. It is in this sense that city rests on nothing. Subjecthood means the independence of essence from temporality, its lasting forever through the course of time. For both of these the external time of event is simply redundant. Tying introduces this time first of all in the form of undoing. The mistake of self-sufficiency then consists in viewing ties as already established. Unlike this, the politics of ties takes them as having to be tied. The structure here is the diachronical scheme of event.

Another transformation that Nancy makes on his way toward the politics of tying is the shift from spacing to enchainment. This entails a redefinition of ties. Whereas the city's ties bind by distributing, in the politics of tying we deal with relationships directed from one unicity to another. Nancy states this clearly speaking of the "tying up of sense from one to the one" (Nancy 1997, 113). How can we think of this sort of tying? It is not accidental that Nancy here speaks of ties between individuals, nations, groups, etc. Now the notion of ties does not possess the ambiguity I discussed before (p. 71). Ties of rights, etc. become unthinkable. Tying becomes a gesture that presupposes the intention to tie up

and enchain. Although Nancy does not speak explicitly about this intention, it is nevertheless present in his analysis under the name of the seizure of speech. Characterising the politics of tying (k)nots, Nancy writes:

Its event could be called the *seizure of speech* [*prise de parole*]: the emergence or passage of some *one* and every *one* into the enchainment of sense effects, statement and offering in phrase or outline, including the cry, the call, and the complaint as much as the theoretical discourse, the poem, and the song, along with the gesture and even silence. (Nancy 1997, 115)

We have arrived at the very centre of the political model that Nancy proposes in this chapter. His intention becomes clear. Community is constituted by the incessant reformulation or reworking of the sense in common. Nancy, with a reference to Jacques Rancière, calls this the “wandering labour of sense” (Nancy 1997, 115). The condition of its possibility is everyone's access to this labour. Everyone must have the right and resources allowing him or her to rise to speak and thereby to contribute to the sense in common. In this case the sense is never complete and always exposed to anyone's rethinking and even rejecting/demolishing. To name it shortly, this is the politics of the recognition of any possible voice. To designate it Nancy also invokes the term compearance from *The Inoperative Community* (Nancy 1997, 113).

Enchainment and tying are supposed to grasp this sort of community. One of their most important features is eventality. Ties exist properly only in the event of tying. Otherwise they come undone by fusion (subjecthood) or atomisation (citizenship) (Nancy 1997, 111). This conviction appears to contradict the intuition that fusion and atomisation also constitute community and are in a certain way ties. For Nancy, however, ties deserve their name only when we consider them in the act of tying, not as already given. But why should we do so? Nancy's answer is: because Being, including the Being of community,

implies nothing pre-given at all. But why should we then be dissatisfied with ties established by subjecthood or citizenship? Why not to repeat them? Obviously, because the repetition concerns not only *me* but also others in community. But the question is whether this recognition of others can be adequately grasped with the eventual character of tying alone; in other words, whether the resources of ontology of event and the distributive model are sufficient for that. I believe that they are not, and this leads to the uncertainty in Nancy's presentation of the act of tying.

How are ties actually established? We can draw two models from the text. The first one is that of the distribution through tying (k)nots. In fact, this is the already familiar ontological model: tying spaces out and differentiates thereby, constituting both unicities and ties between them:

What would happen if, in the Platonic comparison of the art of politics with the art of the weaver, one no longer considered weaving to be the second and as arriving after a given material, but as primary and as itself comprising the *res*? (Nancy 1997, 113)

The second model of tying is enchainment. The act of tying here is "the act of the enchainment of singular sense to every other singular sense" (Nancy 1997, 115) whereas making sense is identified with tying (k)nots (Nancy 1997, 115). Even more, Nancy seems to conceive of (k)nots as events of making sense itself:

the *(k)not* itself is neither a sense nor a goal nor a subject, even and above all if one wants to call it "the law." It is thus quite the contrary of what one calls today, in the magazines, the "search for meaning" with which our time is driving itself crazy. It is the "wandering labour of sense."
(Nancy 1997, 115-6)

According to Nancy, tying (k)nots and enactment from the second model are ties from the first one but viewed “in the process,” i.e. as act. However, these ties are structurally different. In this sense Nancy's characteristic of the politics that he is seeking as that “of the tie as such, rather than of its untying into a space or substance” (Nancy 1997, 114) is rather misleading. Indeed, at the same time enchainment is enacted as a seizure of speech, that is, as a gesture that did not merely happen but was performed by someone. What is this presupposed subjectivity?

Let me try to clarify the situation by means of interpreting tying as saying. To begin with, the seizure of speech should be obviously interpreted as saying. Moreover, it presupposes the subjectivity of involvement, since the seizure of speech points to mineness and the act of taking responsibility for one's speech. It is not yet the responsibility of engagement but already of involvement and letting-be. But tying is more than that. Enchainment also requires the recognition of others' speech, that is, others who are also involved in the “labour of sense”. Thus the links of the chain are not merely the results of an anonymous distribution. They address *me* and await *my* response. This is not to say that the said should be taken as meaningful, but rather as appeal aiming at communicating, establishing ties no matter of what kind. The other does not say anything in particular, she or he seeks a contact with *me*, a language community, where language is not given but is to be created in the appeal itself. The other seeks to be *with me*. The other's saying does not simply amount to the coming of meaning, which equally well may be anonymous. There is a difference between the other's appeal and a mere coming of the future. Both are enacted as *my* hearing or understanding, but the first bears something more than the unpredictability of the coming. It contains, as it were, the unpredictability of the other's judgement, which deprives *me* of the power to decide whether *I* am satisfied with the coming or not.

In its turn, *my* saying becomes addressing others, offering them *my* vision of community (including the vision of the chain). The sense of the world thus is not merely produced or accepted but offered to the community. This means that we encounter here the subject of engagement and the structure of the “for the sake of”. However, as we have seen, it cannot be derived from the distributive model or the ontology of event in general. Consequently Nancy’s concepts of enchainment and tying also exceed their limits. Enchainment is a saying toward the other. However, we have to be aware that the self of the enchainment is not a (k)not. Not (k)nots say toward the other, but we, people who are not constructed by saying (insofar as we have no construction at all) but who use saying for our self-constitution. Nancy’s discourse is about people’s ties. His description of the seizure of speech, rights to speak, etc. has in view people (or groups). See, for instance, *The Sense of the World* where the tied unicities are obviously individuals, groups, etc. (112). The whole discourse here is about people, and it is not clear how it can be applied to “mobile complexes of rights, etc.” Since Nancy does not know—or, better, does not want to take into account—identities other than dwelling on the level of the said, he is not capable of conceiving of the ties of the seizure of speech in its full peculiarity. He interprets the identity of the speaker through distribution. Only this sort of self does he know, in spite of the fact of his provisioning another one. Dissatisfied in this concept of identity (along with a number of contemporary philosophers), he tries to find a remedy in the very act of the self’s birth. However, one needs to make the next step in this direction and admit that this birth points to the self that is in some sense inner (*mine*) and irreducible to the singularity of event. Nancy is halfway here. He has departed from subjecthood and distribution but has not arrived at the selfhood of saying.

Let me be more precise. Identity is constituted in the triple act of (1) producing a narrative structure with places for speakers and objects, (2) taking on a place in this structure, and (3) offering the narrative to others. The first of these acts can be described in

Nancy's manner as spacing and distribution. The second is enacted as a seizure of speech. The third appears when a narrative ceases to be only *my* business, when someone else acquires the right to decide about the world *I* live in. Without this dimension tying ceases to be a proper tying and serves for self-sustaining, even if this "self" is a non-substantive self of flow, movement, or joy.

All these three aspects exclude the pre-givenness of communal ties. However, Nancy, in order to escape the ties' having been already established, focuses on the act of tying (which is, in fact, the act of emergence of a communal myth or narrative). He seems to be convinced that this movement by itself makes up communal ties escaping both nihilism and totalitarianism. In a sense it is true, but Nancy's basic intuition of community—that of language, writing, or writers co-participating in the production of meaning—cannot be conceptually grasped in terms of distributing or spacing. The self of the speaker is more than the unicity of distributed items.

In the theory of (k)nots Nancy puts to work the subjectivity of engagement. However, for him the decisive property of this subjectivity is its temporal character. It is precisely this point that I would like to dispute. It is true that the temporal character of saying is a primary source for the resistance to the totality of immanence. But this resistance is not sufficient for community. The relation to the other demands a passing beyond not only the individual but also the ontology of event as such. The relation to the other demands a separation more radical than that of meanings, horizons, or events. Nancy's accent on dislocation and singularity seeks, in fact, to grasp this separation. But due to his tendency to the spatial quasi-geometrical interpretation he fails to do so. This happens as well in the central concept of the theory of inoperative community—that of literature or writing.

3.3 Literature/writing

The ontological model of writing

Nancy gives his view of community the name of literary communism (“clumsy expression,” in his own words (Nancy 1991, 26)). This makes the meaning of compearance and Being in common more concrete. This is the heart of Nancy’s understanding of community in *The Inoperative Community*. It should be noted that Nancy’s “literature” does not mean what it usually does. Sometimes he calls it writing and adds that it can also be speaking, music, painting, dance, or the exercise of thought (Nancy 1991, 64). It can also be reading, provided it complies with the main condition for Being literature: to interrupt myth. By this interruption literature enacts community. Literature is Being-in-common itself, or even stronger: “it is being *in* common that *is* literary (or scriptuary)” (Nancy 1991, 64). Writing/literature is not just some community’s activity however important or sacred. It is the very Being of community. Literature, Nancy writes, “designates that singular ontological quality that *gives* being *in* common, that does not hold it in reserve, before or after community, as an essence of man, of God, or of the State achieving its fulfilment in communion, but that rather makes for a being that *is* only when shared *in common*, or rather whose quality of being, whose nature and structure are shared (or exposed)” (Nancy 1991, 64). To be in common, thus, is to write. What is then the writing that interrupts myth? As is usual in Nancy, interruption acquires several meanings: temporality of an origin, sharing of a work, sharing as offering to others, and distributive limit of communication. The primary meaning of interruption is temporal: “community without community [i.e. the interrupted community—OD] is *to come*, in the sense that it is always *coming*, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity (because it never stops coming. It ceaselessly resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual)” (Nancy 1991, 71). However, literature is not only the interruption of myth, it must establish a continuity beyond this interruption (Nancy 1991, 72). That is, the interruption must not cease. In a

way, literature interrupts itself, because myth is the invention of literature: “it inaugurates itself with one stroke, one incision, and it names ‘myth’ that which it represents to itself as having been present before this stroke” (Nancy 1991, 72). Myth thus is rather a possibility that literature prevents and is supposed to prevent ceaselessly. This feature is the very definition of literature:

Literature interrupts itself: this is, essentially, what makes it literature (writing) and not myth. Or, better, what interrupts itself—discourse or song, gesture or voice, narrative or proof—*that* is literature (or writing). Precisely what interrupts or suspends its own *mythos* (that is to say, its *logos*) (Nancy 1991, 72).

What is prevented or interrupted is a completion or totality. This happens in a ‘literary’ work but for that “the work... must be offered up for communication” (Nancy 1991, 73). At times Nancy seems to offer singularity itself but more often he speaks of the work, text, myth, foundation. The meaning of the work in the book is quite broad. In effect, Nancy denotes with this word a “result” of literature, the result supposed to be unworked. Work can be complete, and is perhaps always complete, but it becomes incomplete (or, I would say, it becomes engaged in the movement of incompleteness) when it is offered. In general, the offered is capable of—and always tends to—totalisation, which is to say that it is accessible to anyone and can be shared by everyone (a myth, work, foundation can be adopted by all society). What prevents totalisation is the act of sharing itself. Having been offered, myth ceases to be a myth: “The text interrupts itself at the point where it shares itself out—at every moment, to you, from him or her to you, to me, to them. In a sense, it is the sharing of myth. It is community exchanging and distributing its myth. Nothing could resemble more closely our myth of the foundation and communion of a tribe, or a people, indeed of humanity. And yet, this is not what it is” (Nancy 1991, 65). In the offering myth is disjoined or withdrawn from itself (Nancy 1991, 61). Myth holds in itself its own

difference from itself. Nancy obviously thinks of this difference ontologically: writing the myth is equivalent to Being the myth, with Being understood transitively. The logic of limit borrowed from Hegel and Plato and developed on the starting pages of *The Inoperative Community* works here perfectly: myth cannot be absolute inasmuch as it exists.

Therefore, we have to search for the meaning of interruption not in the work itself but in the mode of its appearing. It can appear in the mode of myth or in the mode of literature/writing (offering). Myth turns into a literary work when the mythic hero

tells the truth: that he is not a hero, not even, or especially not, the hero of writing or literature, and that there is no hero, there is no figure who alone assumes and presents the heroism of the life and death of commonly singular beings. He tells the truth of the interruption of his myth, the truth of the interruption of all founding speeches, of all creative and poetic speech, of speech that schematizes a world and that fictions an origin and an end. He says, therefore, that foundation, poiesis, and scheme are always offered, endlessly (Nancy 1991, 79).

This passage contains two possible meanings of interruption. It is whether a passing beyond the Absolute or the One (“there is no figure who alone assumes...”) or a temporal movement that dissolves any mythic consistency (“foundation, poiesis, and scheme are always offered, endlessly”). Nancy draws no difference between them. But he is able to do so only thanks to the fact that any passing beyond the One is for him first of all temporal (which is to say, ontological). We have seen that this is Nancy’s main thesis: community is based on the relational character of Being. Hence the ontology of event is set to work. Interruption denotes the unstable ontological character of myth. It is not however merely the need for the act of saying in order to be. Interruption stops the order of signs by introducing the order of significance. Writing is “the breaking of the path [*frayage*] of

significance” (Nancy 1997, 118), it makes signification possible. Thus, the temporality of interruption is that of the origin of significance or of an inaugural act:

The communism of being-in-common and of writing (of the writing of being-in-common) is neither an idea nor an image, neither a message nor a fable, neither a foundation nor a fiction. It consists, in its entirety—it is total in this respect, not totalitarian—in the inaugural act that each work takes up and that each text retraces: in coming to the limit, in letting the limit appear as such, in interrupting the myth. (Nancy 1991, 68)

Thus, the interruption is thought as “coming to the limit, letting the limit appear as such.” At the same time, the limit appear as a “dividing line” between *me* and the other:

On this limit, the one who exposes himself and to whom—if we listen, if we read, if our ethical and political condition is one of listening or reading—we expose ourselves, does not deliver a founding speech. On the contrary, he suspends this speech, he interrupts it and says that he is interrupting it. (Nancy 1991, 68)

From here on Nancy comprehends the limit in terms of distributing and dislocating—dividing, to be more exact. Although he warns against seeing the limit as a mere boundary between singularities (Nancy 1991, 32), he means thereby to undermine the picture of singularities as pre-existing entities limited by one another—the limit does not limit but constitutes singularity.

In general, Nancy tends to present the limit in the distributive framework. Thereby the temporality of interruption and the separation of communication both acquire the spatial sense of differential distribution or ontological multiplicity. However, as in cases of singularity, compearance, tying and others, his own description transcends the distributive model.

Writing as exposition and addressing the other

In *The Sense of the World* writing is “the breaking of the path [*frayage*] of significance through which it becomes possible not only for significations to be signified but for them to *make sense in being passed on and shared among individuals*” (Nancy 1997, 118). In this fashion writing possesses two dimensions. First, it is *différance* or the very act of distribution, spacing out, and *frayage*. Second, it is the exposition of a writer, her/his opening toward others and offering oneself. The sharing out of one’s work (the core meaning of sharing in *The Inoperative Community*) has something to do with communication and “the passage from one to another” (Nancy 1991, 65). It is this passage that, according to Nancy, interrupts myth:

Myth is interrupted by literature precisely to the extent that literature does not come to an end. . . It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes from an author to a reader, and from this reader to another reader or to another author. It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes on to another work by the same author or at the place where it passes into other works of other authors. It does not come to an end where its narrative passes into other narratives, its poem into other poems, its thought into other thoughts, or into the inevitable suspension of the thought or the poem (Nancy 1991, 64-5).

This long list of different entities indicates, in fact, that literature is a passing from one singularity to another (and leaves the impression, by the way, that it is readers, writers, etc. who are singularities in the primordial sense). Nancy states this explicitly: “the text, or the writing, stems only from the singular relationship between singular beings” (Nancy 1991, 66); “A singular being (‘you’, or ‘me’) has the precise structure and nature of a being of writing, of a ‘literary’ being: it resides only in the communication—which does not commune—of its advance and its retreat. It offers itself, it holds itself in suspense” (Nancy

1991, 78). This passing from one singularity to another should not, of course, be understood as a sort of access, or even less as a sending of a message. To pass to another means to arrive at “the limit where being itself, where being-in-common conceals us one from the other” (Nancy 1991, 66). We came across the same paradox again: to be in common is to be separated, to touch the non-traversable limit concealing us one from another. We encounter the notion of limit again but this time it is conceived as separation rather than distribution.

Thus, writing is offering, simultaneous putting into social space and creating the space itself (or, which is the same, creating the space by putting one’s work into it). In this way “it is ‘literature’ that does the sharing” (Nancy 1991, 64). The gesture of offering is dual. On the one hand, it follows the logic of sedimentation: having been said, the myth becomes a form accessible for everyone’s usage, a foundation capable of being taken over by anyone. Offering in this sense is rather detaching, not so much giving as taking away. It does presuppose others but rather negatively as ones who share *my* myth even if *I* try to prevent this. On the other hand, offering addresses others. It does not merely leave traces; it offers a foundation and invites others to share it. By definition, “any one who writes for the same, for himself, or for the anonymity of the crowd is not a writer” (Nancy 1991, 66). Nancy calls this sort of offering exposition. Literature is a multiplicity of voices; each of them is a voice as long as it shares itself, i.e. writes *for* others. And again, Nancy presents the multiplicity of voices in different ways. Some of them fit into the distributive model but others go beyond it. This is visible more than anywhere in the understanding of the voice of the other. This voice has a specific ontological status. Its experience is not passive and depends on one’s efforts: “Everything is a matter of one’s practical, ethical, political—and why not add spiritual?—positioning around this singular eruption of voice. You can always make a myth out of it again. But this voice, or another, will always begin interrupting the myth again—sending us back to the limit” (Nancy 1991, 67-8). Voice is

the experience of the other, limits, and outside. Being so it is essentially ethical. Voice plays a decisive role in the constitution of singularity. Although Nancy insists that singularity is that of Being itself, the consideration of voice in *The Inoperative Community* on page 76 shows that he relies, in fact, on its specific experience. It is here that Nancy writes:

I no longer (no longer essentially) hear in it [dialogue—OD] what the other *wants to say* (to me), but I hear in it that the other, or some other (*de l'autre*) speaks and that there is an essential articulation of the voice and of voices, which constitute the being *in common* itself (Nancy 1991, 76).

I hear thus not what is said but the other's saying as such. What happens here is the acknowledging of the other's voice and applying to it the structure of *my* voice and its articulation. The mineness of saying becomes multiple. In this sense indeed the hearing of the other's voice amounts to the Being in common. Nevertheless, Nancy is ambiguous here. This reasoning appears in the context of discussing articulation (Nancy 1991, 75-8; see p. 62 in this thesis) where it remains uncertain whether or not voices are understood as horizons. The sociality of articulation is first of all opposed to that of fusion or immanence. Nancy conceives of totality as the play of articulations. But for this he has no need to go beyond the sphere of mineness. The multiplicity of horizons—and accordingly of the voices each articulated in its own horizon—is already such a totality. By contrast, the acknowledging of the other's voice demands a completely different gesture irreducible to the ontological event.

Later on Nancy conceives of the "voiceness" of the voice (the fact of voice, that is, the fact of its appearing) as Being-voice, that is, in the ontological framework. This, in turn, allows him to conceive of community ontologically, that is, eventually in terms of revelation (Being reveals beings and itself). Even though Nancy rejects the ontology of

revelation³⁶, his interpretation seems to comply with its logic. But contrary to this, community seems incapable of revelation, be it even that of event. In this sense we are always in the position of extreme uncertainty about community: we cannot know not only whether it will be, but also whether it has been or is at the moment. Perhaps even the coming community is too an optimistic image and this precisely opens up the ethical dimension. We cannot even know if ethics (and community) is possible in the world, although it already demands our decision. This demand does not yet constitute a community but does constitute an ethics. Community is rather a response to this demand, taking on the responsibility for a common world. This view is present in Nancy's book, explicitly or implicitly, but his ontological assumptions make it difficult to be observed.

We find the already familiar logic in the theory of writing/literature. On the one hand, Nancy proceeds in accordance with the double internal articulation of the voice which is, first, insufficient like any entity and thus implies some sort of otherness and, second, may be inscribed into different incommensurable horizons and is thus inevitably multiple. This double principal non-oneness of the voice is for Nancy a sign of the presence of other voices, i.e. of a community. This is, of course, the logic of the distributive model. On the other hand, Nancy refers to a more immediate experience of the other—that of addressing—although, as happened before, he tries to reduce it to the ontological one. However, the community of the other's saying is that of neither transcendental Being nor the multiplicity of horizons or orders of significance.

Therefore, the term 'literary communism' designates a society of voices each open toward others and existing only through and in this opening. The model of this society is literature where a writer "is not the author, nor is he the hero, and perhaps he is no longer

³⁶ He does so explicitly in *The Sense of the World* where the ontology of revelation is named phenomenology (177, note 19). Here, I believe, Nancy is close to this ontology and still relies upon it. His exposition still has visual connotations, although it is already thought of as touch.

what has been called the poet or what has been called the thinker; rather, he is a singular voice” (Nancy 1991, 70). Each voice does produce a myth, that is, a total and closed in itself foundation of the Whole. But the act of offering (which constitutes literature) interrupts this myth and stops its totalisation. In this sense the sharing of myths, texts, works is the Being-in-common itself. Nancy states this explicitly: “being-in-common *is* literary, ... it has its very being in ‘literature’ (in writing, in a certain voice, in a singular music, but also in a painting, in a dance, and in the exercise of thought)” (Nancy 1991, 64). Beings communicating through writing are called singular beings. Writing is not a revealing of the boundary between pre-existing singularities. They come to being only through writing itself.

However, this appearing singularities—or the ‘between’ as such—in the act of writing can be understood at least in two ways and Nancy actually does so. One way stems, in fact, from Derrida’s idea of *différance* as a movement of differing-deferring. As I tried to demonstrate in the course of this work, this way does not allow one to surpass the sphere of mineness. The other way, in contrast, is a movement toward the other from the very outset. The incommensurability of the two ways become especially visible when one realises that they correspond to two functions of writing/literature—or, broader, language—the cognitive and communicative (or even phatic) ones. It become immediately clear then that community following from addressing and exposing has nothing in common with that based on the fact of meaning or significance, even when it is conceived as *frayage* or the origin of significance.

Conclusions

In my conclusion I would like to outline the main themes and turning points of my thesis. Nancy formulates his task as the elaboration of a theory of community that will be based on its own interruption. It should be set against both myth (a pre-given and determined community) and nihilism (an arbitrary and non-obligatory community). To accomplish this end, he must invent a concept of community that is neither unable to be interrupted nor without any ties at all. Nancy seeks a solution in basing community on the very event of interruption understood not merely as disappearing community but rather as re-establishing its ties. This community is not mythic but neither is it without a myth. It is the incessant movement of inventing myths. Hence it is the origin of myth (or sense or significance or community's ties) that is brought to the focus of Nancy's work.

At the same time, myth for Nancy invents not only ties but along with them the tied items, that is, not only social relations but also members of society (individuals or groups). This allows him to liken the event of community to that of Being. He relies on the Heideggerian tradition and understands Being transitively as the presentation of entities or attestation of the world. Hence Nancy works out the theme of 'there is' which he understands as the attestation or presentation of sense or the world. However, to derive a social theory from Heidegger's fundamental ontology one needs something more than the movement, gesture, or event of Being. For this reason Nancy undertakes a further elaboration. He borrows the concept of *différance* from Derrida and that of horizon from hermeneutics and applies them to community. The event of Being appears thus as a distribution, dislocation, or *frayage*. But instead of the differing-deferring of meaning or signification he speaks of singularities and social ties. The Being of community consists in

the ceaseless spacing out and differentiation in which not only ties but also the items to be tied are brought about. One of the best examples of this strategy is Nancy's theory of tying (k)nots.

However, this identification of communal ties with signifying references has a weak point. Neither Heidegger's ontology nor Derrida's *différance* goes beyond the sphere of mineness³⁷. This makes their usefulness for a theory of community highly problematical. Indeed, Being as well as *différance* always happen to *me* and it is not clear how *my* sense can be understood as others' or how *my* view on community can be extended to others'. It would be wrong to interpret this mineness in terms of self-sufficient and self-reflexive subjectivity. It implies, of course, unconsciousness and acquired social practices, which are in a certain way external. Nevertheless, it still has to do with internalised roles, models, gestures, etc.³⁸ In this sense one deals here with the Other within oneself (and thus we can speak of anonymity), whereas the case in point should be the other that is more radically outside than unconsciousness. As we have seen, Nancy turns to the experience of this other when he speaks of writing/literature, offering a work, and exposing toward others.

At the same time, as we have also observed, Nancy reduces writing to Being and offering to presentation. The very term that designates the movement of writing—*partage*—signifies simultaneously dividing or distributing and offering (one's part). However, Nancy's interpretation of writing is not reducible to the ontology of event. It is more than the fact of Being, even taking into account that this fact is simultaneously the

³⁷ We cannot say the same about hermeneutics, at least in its Gadamerian version. He perfectly realised the importance of addressing in his elaboration of anticipatory and question-answer structure of understanding (see Gadamer 1993, for example).

³⁸ I use the term 'internalisation' in the sense of the subjectivity of involvement: to internalise means to learn how to repeat, that is to say, how to be involved in a differential system of gestures.

fact of the *Sein-Seiende* difference and the fact of time. Writing, as Nancy conceives of it, is never anonymous. Not in the sense that it has an author who “expresses his/her thought in words,” but in the sense of someone’s responsibility for giving/offering itself. In the ontology of event subjectivity, if it exists as such, is grasped as a place of the “happening” of Being (for instance, Dasein in *Being and Time*), in this sense irresponsible because it precedes any possible act of taking over responsibility. But writing, inasmuch as it is the offering *for* others, is itself praxis, which can be chosen, or not. More exactly still, writing is rather a response to the event of Being, not this event itself. Ontological difference (actually, *différance*) is not enough to comprehend writing.

On the other hand, writing is not a mode of Being understood hermeneutically or phenomenologically as the meaning of a being’s Being (that is, what means to be this being, this entity). If it were so, to be a work/myth would mean to be written for others. But in this case others would be reduced to the mode of Being: to be the other would mean to be the addressee of a written work. The other would be thus immanentised, which cannot be true for writing. The latter is not merely the inauguration of the world where the other (as well as the writer) has this or that place. The other is rather the one who crashes the world but does so in another way than death does. This difference between the ways of the world’s interruption is precisely what exceeds ontology. Writing is more than a mode of Being because it is Being-for-someone. It is the existence devoted to someone, but devoted without making a work or project out of it. Writing is precisely the suspension of any work or project. It is for the sake of community.

There are, therefore, different ethical attitudes associated with distribution and separation. They correspond to the two types of subjectivity that I have described throughout this thesis. The first one can be characterised as “for the sake of itself or self-sustaining”. This is a subject of flow, incessant withdrawal of itself, radical ungroundedness of any stage, and so forth. This is the courage of the openness toward the

future, heroic acceptance of the coming destiny and opening this destiny with one's own deeds (Is such a courage not the primary meaning and a hidden ground of Heidegger's explication of Dasein as resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) in *Being and Time*? I believe so.). Community, undoubtedly, demands such courage but it also demands something more. This subjectivity is totalisable in the sense of reducing to the sphere of mineness, whereas community requires rather that one exceeds this sphere. The ethics of this subject is based on the acceptance of internal plurality and the rejection of any attempts to unify oneself. It is indeed the resistance to totality but is not yet a community.

This subject uses a language for self-sustaining. Performing gestures, it aims solely at the performance itself, or, better, at the prolongation of itself as a performing instance. In this sense it opens toward nothing and is ready to accept everything. It does resist the immanence of essence but at the same time forms the immanence of mineness or that of a flow, the very movement of Being revealing itself. This is a strategy of radical scepticism depriving Being of any essence. The best strategy for it is following the flow of the event (be worthy of the event, as Deleuze puts it) because there is nothing beyond, above, or beneath it.

Doubtless, this is not Nancy's choice. He explicitly argues against this standpoint and devotes the whole of *The Sense of the World* to the demonstration and elaboration of the irreducible sense of Being resisting any sceptical denial. However, this irreducible sense amounts, in fact, to the subjectivity of involvement or, more precisely, to the fact of involvement. "The sense or world is there" means that the structure of 'senseness' or 'worldness' is there. In terms of language this means that the structure of significance is there, or language itself is there. The passage to community thus appears as a passage from unconscious repetition to the active will to language or will to bring forth the structure of significance, to be involved into originating significance. So structured, this passage is equivalent to that from *Man* to *Entschlossenheit* as described in Heidegger's *Being and*

Time (see especially p. 60). But the subjectivity of self-sustaining fits into this picture. Hence, if we want to go beyond it we need to focus not merely on the will to language but on that for the sake of which the language is desired.

Thus, we arrive at the second type of subjectivity, which is “for the sake of community”. In what sense? As far as I can see, there are two such senses: 1) this subject uses language not for self-sustaining but for addressing others or making oneself accessible to them, 2) this subject recognises the other’s right to speak. In both cases the fundamental structure of saying remains intact and this subjectivity wills language and world thereby securing the structure of ‘senseness/worldness’. But unlike the subjectivity of self-sustaining, this one implies some aims that surpass the event of sense (or the fact of the origin of sense). This is that for the sake of what the event is performed. Furthermore, the recognition of the other’s right to speak amounts to the recognition of the other’s saying and allows one to escape the logic of event with its tendency to reduce everything to *me*. Without it compearance fails to ground a proper community. It does reveal the possibility of others by opening up the place they might dwell in. But this place is empty—or perhaps does not even exist—until I recognise the other’s right to speak. This recognition is truly groundless and stems from neither the structure of the world nor its Being. Perhaps its only ground is the ethical decision—to be *with* others, to keep building a common world with them. No doubt, this is the underlying principle of Nancy’s theory of community, although his “ontological reductionism” makes it obscure.

Therefore, in the course of this thesis we discovered the subjectivity of involvement, which can be described in terms of distribution, spacing, or origin of significance. But above this we found two subjectivities for which this terminology turned out to be insufficient. They demand the invention of something for the sake of which the spacing is performed. Nancy keeps to the concept of distribution and this reveals, I believe, a weak point in the postmodern project in general. The latter can be formulated as follows.

The key theme of postmodern philosophy is the impossibility of universality and its dependence on the play of differences, which is the play of language. In this context, not only universality but also subjectivity appears as a mere effect of the intersection and overlapping of heterogeneous forces. *Différance* or the incessant originating of differential structures lies behind any individual or collective universality and stability, thereby making them no more than simulacra. The same goes for the subject becoming capable of appearing and sustaining only in the context of anonymous discourse. This leads to radical relativism and nihilism. Nancy's concept of writing surpasses this approach (and in particular Derrida's concept of writing). He opposes to it the undeniable fact of Being which after a closer consideration proves to be the fact of language understood in the active sense of saying. However, in another sense he still resides within the limits of the so understood postmodernism. For he still relies on the movement of differentiation and seems to be convinced that the 'active' distributive model solves the problem of relativism. He aims to demonstrate that the saying always opens a common world, and hence the fact of language is equivalent to the fact of community. However, in so doing he argues from the multiplicity of saying, that is to say, again from the movement of *différance*. And this is so in spite of his own description of writing as a speaking of one to another. It is difficult to say why he does so, but perhaps this is because of a typically postmodern presumption that subjectivity can be nothing but an effect of *différance*.

However, community and ethics, by contrast, call for the deciding subject, the one who is not merely involved in the anonymous movement of differentiation but devotes her- or himself to this or that movement without ever being certain that "that for the sake of which" is approachable at all. This subject of fidelity without illusions does not perhaps precede the movement of saying and does not exist otherwise than in a gesture of saying but once appeared cannot simply repeat the gesture and is liable to take responsibility for it. Thus, postmodernism is right in saying that *I* was brought into the world by external

forces but, since this happened and since *I* realise that this has happened, it becomes impossible for *me* to avoid the responsibility for the world arisen well before *my* birth and for the community in creation of which *I* am supposed to take part from now on. This is what postmodernism seems not to realise.

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